

# IMITATE THEIR FAITH

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# He Was Kept “Safe With Seven Others”

**N**OAH and his family huddled together as the rain came down in torrents. Just picture them, their features outlined in the gloom by the flickering light of an oil lamp, their eyes wide as they listened to the water cascading down onto the roof and lashing against the sides of the ark. The noise must have been overwhelming.

As Noah looked at the faces of his beloved family—his faithful wife and his three stalwart sons along with their wives—his heart no doubt swelled with gratitude. In that dark hour, he likely found comfort in seeing the people he loved the most right there with him. They were all safe and sound. Surely he led his family in a prayer of gratitude, raising his voice so that they could hear him above the din.

Noah was a man of great faith. It was because of Noah’s faith that his God, Jehovah, was moved to protect him and his family. (Hebrews 11:7) But did their need for faith end when the rain began to fall? On the contrary, they would urgently need that quality in the challenging days ahead. The same can be said of us in these tumultuous times. So let us see what we can learn from the faith of Noah.

## “FORTY DAYS AND FORTY NIGHTS”

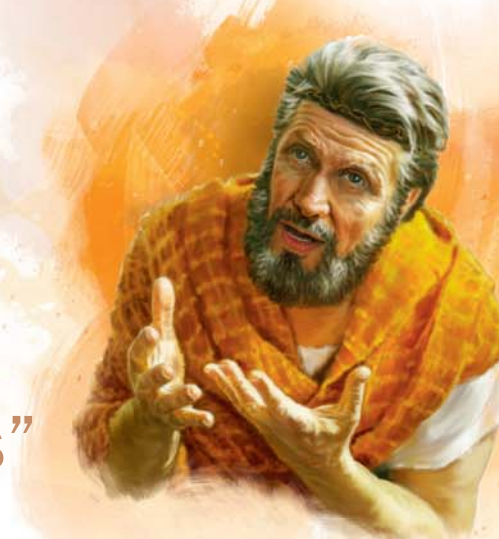
Outside, the downpour continued “for forty days and forty nights.” (Genesis 7:4, 11, 12) The water kept rising and rising and rising. As it did, Noah could see that his God, Jehovah, was simultaneously protecting righteousness and punishing wickedness.

The Flood checked a rebellion that had broken out among the angels. Influenced by Satan’s selfish attitude, many angels had forsaken their “proper dwelling place” in heaven to cohabit with women, producing hybrid offspring called Nephilim. (Jude 6; Genesis 6:4) Satan no doubt was filled with glee as that rebellion unfolded, for it further debased mankind, the pinnacle of Jehovah’s creation on earth.

However, as the floodwaters rose, the rebel angels were forced to shed their material bodies and return to the spirit realm, never again to assume fleshly form. They left their wives and their offspring behind to die in the floodwaters, along with that society of humans.

From the days of Enoch, almost seven centuries earlier, Jehovah had warned mankind that He would destroy wicked, ungodly people. (Genesis 5:24; Jude 14, 15) Since that time, people had only got worse, ruining the earth and filling it with violence. Now destruction was upon them. Did Noah and his family rejoice in those executions?

No! Nor did their merciful God. (Ezekiel 33: 11) Jehovah had done everything to save as many as possible. He had commissioned Enoch’s warning, and he had ordered Noah to build the ark. Noah and his family had been laboring on that massive project for decades, in full view of the people. What is more, Jehovah directed Noah to serve as “a preacher of righteousness.” (2 Peter 2:5) Like Enoch before him, he warned people about the judgment that was coming upon the



world. And how did they respond? Jesus, who witnessed events from heaven, later recalled the people of Noah's day: "They took no note until the flood came and swept them all away."—Matthew 24:39.

Imagine what it must have been like for Noah and his family during those first 40 days after Jehovah shut the door to the ark. As the torrential rains kept drumming down on the ark day after day, the eight of them likely settled into some kind of routine—caring for one another, tending to their home, and seeing to the needs of the animals in their enclosures. At one moment, though, the whole immense structure shuddered and lurched. The ark was moving! Cradled on the rising waters, the ark was lifted up, higher and higher, until "it was floating high above the earth." (Genesis 7:17) What an amazing demonstration of the power of the Almighty God, Jehovah!

Noah must have been thankful—not only for his safety and that of his family but also for Jehovah's mercy in using them to warn the people who perished outside the ark. Those years of hard work may have seemed unrewarding at the time. People were so unresponsive! Think of it—Noah likely had brothers, sisters, nephews, and nieces alive before the Flood came; yet, no one except his immediate family listened to him. (Genesis 5:30) Now, as those eight souls clung to safety in the ark, they surely drew comfort from thinking back on all the time they had spent giving people a chance to survive.

Jehovah has not changed since Noah's day. (Malachi 3:6) Jesus Christ explained that our times today are much like "the days of Noah." (Matthew 24:37) Ours is a marked era, a time of great trouble that is due to end in the destruction of a corrupt world system of things. Today, God's people are likewise delivering a warning message to all who will listen. Will you respond to that message? If you have already accepted the truth of that lifesaving message, will you join in sharing it with others? Noah and his family set the example for us all.



No doubt Noah took the lead in family worship even in the darkest times



## **“CARRIED SAFELY THROUGH THE WATER”**

As the ark drifted on that surging ocean, those within surely heard a symphony of squeaks and groans from the massive timbers. Was Noah worried about the size of the waves or the structural integrity of the ark? No. Such concerns may arise among skeptics today, but Noah was no skeptic. The Bible says: “By faith Noah . . . constructed an ark.” (Hebrews 11:7) Faith in what? Jehovah had made a covenant, a formal agreement, to bring Noah and all those with him safely through the Deluge. (Genesis 6:18, 19) Could not the One who created the universe, the earth, and all the living things on it keep that vessel intact? Of course! Noah rightly trusted in Jehovah to keep His promise. And, indeed, he and his family were “carried safely through the water.”—1 Peter 3:20.

After 40 days and 40 nights had passed, the rain finally stopped. By our calendar, it was sometime in December 2370 B.C.E. But the family’s adventure aboard the ark was far from over. That craft full of living creatures drifted alone on a global sea, well above even the tops of mountains. (Genesis 7:19, 20) We may imagine Noah organizing the heavier labor so that he and his sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—could keep all the animals fed, clean, and healthy. Of course, the same God who rendered all those wild creatures docile enough to enter the ark was able to keep them in such a state for the duration of the Flood.\*

Noah evidently kept a careful log of events. That record tells when the rains started and stopped. It also reveals that the waters overwhelmed the earth for 150 days. Finally, the waters began to abate. One momentous day, the ark gently came to rest on “the mountains of Ararat,” located in modern-day Turkey. That would have been in April 2369 B.C.E. It was 73 days later, in June, that the tops of the mountains became visible. Three months later, in September, Noah decided to remove some part of the ark’s covering,

or roof. Surely that heavy work was rewarded as light and fresh air poured in. Earlier, Noah also began testing the environment to see if it was safe and habitable. He released a raven, which came and went for a while, perhaps perching on the ark between flights; then Noah released a dove, which kept returning to him until it finally found a place to roost.—Genesis 7:24–8:13.

Noah’s routine no doubt focused still more on spiritual matters. We may well picture the family gathering regularly to pray together and to talk about their protective heavenly Father. Noah relied on Jehovah for every important decision. Even when Noah could see that the earth had finally “dried off”—after more than a year aboard the ark—he still did not unseal the door and lead an exodus from the confines of that vessel. (Genesis 8:14) No, he waited for word from Jehovah!

Family heads today can learn a great deal from that faithful man. He was orderly, industrious, patient, and protective of all those under his care. Above all, though, he considered the will of Jehovah God first in all things. If we imitate Noah’s faith in these respects, we will bring blessings to all those we love.

## **“GO OUT OF THE ARK”**

Finally, Jehovah’s command came. “Go out of the ark,” he told Noah, “you and your wife and your sons and your sons’ wives with you.” Obediently, the family led the way, and all the animals followed. How? In a chaotic stampede? Not at all! The record states that “according to their families they went out of the ark.” (Genesis 8:15-19) Once outdoors, breathing in the fresh mountain air and looking out over the highlands of Ararat, Noah and his family saw before them a cleansed earth. Gone were the Nephilim, the violence, the rebellious angels, and that entire wicked society!\* Mankind had a chance to make a fresh start.

\* Some have raised the possibility that God kept the animals in a state of relative torpor, akin to hibernation, thus reducing their need for food. Whether he did so or not, he certainly kept his promise, ensuring the safety and survival of all aboard the ark.

\* Also gone from the earth was any trace of the original Garden of Eden, which was likely obliterated in the floodwaters. If so, the cherubs guarding the entrance were then free to return to heaven, their 1600-year assignment complete at last.—Genesis 3:22-24.



Noah and his family emerged from the ark onto a cleansed earth

Noah knew what to do. He started with worship. He built an altar and used some of the animals that God viewed as clean—which they had brought aboard in “sevens”—and offered up a burnt sacrifice to Jehovah. (Genesis 7:2; 8:20) Did that worship please Jehovah?

The Bible answers in these reassuring words: “Jehovah began to smell a restful odor.” The pain that had filled God’s heart when mankind was filling the world with violence was replaced by the restful, pleasant sensation of seeing a family of faithful worshippers on earth who were determined to carry out his will. Jehovah did not expect them to be perfect. The same verse continues: “The inclination of the heart of man is bad from his youth up.” (Genesis 8:21) Consider how Jehovah further expressed his patient compassion for humankind.

God lifted the curse on the ground. Back in the days of the rebellion of Adam and Eve, God had pronounced that curse, making cultivation unusually difficult. Noah’s father, Lamech, had named his son Noah—probably meaning “Rest,” or “Consolation”—and had foretold that his son would lead mankind to a time of rest from that curse. Noah must have beamed when he learned that he would now see that prophecy fulfilled and that the earth would respond more readily to efforts to cultivate it. Little wonder that Noah soon took up farming!—Genesis 3:17, 18; 5:28, 29; 9:20.

At the same time, Jehovah gave all the descendants of Noah some clear, simple laws to guide

them in life—including a prohibition against murder and the misuse of blood. God also established a covenant with mankind, promising that he would never again bring a flood to destroy all life on earth. As a sign of the reliability of his word, Jehovah gave mankind its first glimpse of a glorious natural phenomenon—the rainbow. Down to this day, every rainbow we see offers a comforting reminder of Jehovah’s loving promise.—Genesis 9:1-17.

If Noah’s story were mere fiction, it might well have ended with that rainbow. But Noah was a real man, and his life was not so simple. In those days when longevity was the norm, that faithful man had to endure another 350 years, and those centuries brought him a lot of pain. He made a serious mistake when he gave in to drunkenness on one occasion, but that error was compounded when his grandson Canaan committed a more serious sin—a sin that brought grim consequences to Canaan’s family. Noah lived on long enough to see his descendants fall into such sins as idolatry and violence in the days of Nimrod. On the brighter side, though, Noah got to see his son Shem set a strong example of faith for his family.—Genesis 9:21-28; 10:8-11; 11:1-11.

Like Noah, we need to endure in a course of faith. When others around us ignore the true God or even leave off serving him, we need to stay on course as Noah did. Jehovah greatly values such faithful endurance. As Jesus Christ said, “he that has endured to the end is the one that will be saved.”—Matthew 24:13. ■



# She Was “Declared Righteous by Works”

**R**AHAB peered from her window as the light of dawn streamed onto the plain surrounding Jericho. An invading army was gathered out there—the forces of Israel. As they began yet another march around the city, the dust rose in their wake and the blare of horns again pierced the air.

Jericho was Rahab’s home; she knew its streets, its houses, its teeming markets and shops. She knew its people even better. She could sense their fear intensifying as the days passed and Israel continued this strange ritual—marching around the city once each day. As the sound of their horns echoed in the streets and squares of Jericho, though, Rahab did not feel the dread and despair that her people did.

Rahab watched as the army began its march early on this seventh day. Amid the Israelite soldiers, she saw their priests blowing horns and bearing the sacred ark that represented the presence of their God, Jehovah. We might imagine Rahab’s hand resting on a scarlet cord hanging from her window, which looked out from Jericho’s great wall. That cord reminded Rahab of her hope that she and her family would survive the destruction of the city. Was Rahab a traitor? Certainly not to Jehovah; he saw her as a woman of remarkable faith. Let us go back to the beginning of Rahab’s story and see what we can learn from her.

## RAHAB THE PROSTITUTE

Rahab was a prostitute. That stark fact so alarmed some Bible commentators in the past that they claimed that she was merely an innkeeper. The Bible, though, is quite clear and does not whitewash the facts. (Joshua 2:1; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25) In Canaanite society, Rahab’s profession was probably respectable enough. However, culture cannot always eradicate conscience, that inner sense of right and wrong that Jehovah has given us all. (Romans 2:14, 15) Rahab may have keenly sensed that her way of life was degrading. Perhaps, like many today in such walks of life, she felt that she was trapped, with no other choice if she wanted to care for her family.

No doubt Rahab longed for a better life. Her homeland was full of violence and depravity, including incest and bestiality. (Leviticus 18:3, 6, 21-24) The prevalence of such evils in the land had much to do with religion. The temples promoted ritual prostitution, and the worship of such demonic gods as Baal and Molech included the burning of children alive in sacrificial fires.

Jehovah was not blind to what was going on in Canaan. In fact, because of the many wicked practices of the Canaanites, Jehovah said: “The land is unclean, and I shall bring punishment for its error upon it, and the land will vomit its inhabitants out.” (Leviticus 18:25) What did “punishment for its error” involve? In general,



Rahab put  
her faith in  
the God of  
the Israelites



Israel was given this divine promise: “Jehovah your God will certainly push these nations away from before you little by little.” (Deuteronomy 7: 22) Centuries earlier, Jehovah had promised the land to the family of Abraham, and “God . . . cannot lie.”—Titus 1:2; Genesis 12:7.

However, Jehovah also decreed that certain groups in the land were to be completely wiped out. (Deuteronomy 7:1, 2) As the righteous “Judge of all the earth,” he had read every heart and knew well how deeply entrenched their wickedness and depravity were. (Genesis 18: 25; 1 Chronicles 28:9) What was it like for Rahab to live in such a condemned city? We can only imagine how she felt as reports about Israel reached her ears. She learned that the God of Israel had led his people—a downtrodden nation of slaves—to complete victory over the army of Egypt, the mightiest fighting force in the world of that time. And now Israel was about to attack Jericho! Yet, the people of that city persisted in their wickedness. We can see why the Bible speaks of Rahab’s fellow Canaanites as “those who acted disobediently.”—Hebrews 11:31.

Rahab was different. Over the years, she could have contemplated the reports she heard about Israel and its God, Jehovah. How completely unlike the Canaanite gods he was! Here was a God who fought for his people instead of victimizing them, who elevated the morals of his worshipers instead of debasing them. This God treated women as precious, not as mere sexual objects

to be bought, sold, and degraded in vile worship. When Rahab learned that Israel was camped across the Jordan, poised to invade, she must have been dismayed over what that could mean for her people. Did Jehovah notice Rahab and value the good in her?

Today, there are many people like Rahab. They feel trapped, stuck in a way of life that robs them of dignity and joy; they feel invisible and worthless. Rahab’s case is a comforting reminder that none of us are invisible to God. No matter how low we feel, “he is not far off from each one of us.” (Acts 17:27) He is close by, ready and eager to offer hope to all those who put faith in him. Did Rahab do that?

### **SHE RECEIVED THE SPIES**

One day, sometime before Israel marched around Jericho, two strangers appeared at Rahab’s door. The two men were hoping to pass unnoticed, but in that tense city, many were on the alert to detect any potential spies from Israel. Sharp-eyed Rahab may have been quick to draw her own conclusions. Not that it was unusual for strange men to come to her door, but these two wanted only lodging—not the services of a prostitute.

The two men were, in fact, spies from the camp of Israel. Their commander, Joshua, had sent them to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of Jericho. This was the first city of Canaan that Israel was to invade and perhaps the

strongest of them all. Joshua wanted to know just what he and his men would be facing. The spies no doubt chose Rahab's house deliberately. Here of all places, at the home of a prostitute, strangers might pass unnoticed. Perhaps the spies also hoped to pick up useful information from any careless talk they might overhear.

The Bible says that Rahab "received the messengers hospitably." (James 2:25) She took them into her home, and even if she had suspicions about who they were and why they were there, she let the men stay. Perhaps she hoped to learn more about their God, Jehovah.

Suddenly, though, messengers from the king of Jericho arrived! Word had spread that spies from Israel had come to the house of Rahab. What would Rahab do? If she protected those two strangers, might she not put herself and her entire household at risk? Would not the people of Jericho slaughter them all if she sheltered such enemies? On the other hand, Rahab could now have no doubt about the identity of the men. If she already knew that Jehovah was a far better God than her own, might this be her opportunity to take a stand on Jehovah's side?

Rahab had little time to think, yet she was resourceful and acted quickly. She had the spies

hide among stalks of flax that were laid out to dry on the flat roof of her house. Then she spoke to the king's messengers, saying: "Yes, the men did come to me, and I did not know from where they were. And it came about at the closing of the gate by dark that the men went out. I just do not know where the men have gone. Chase after them quickly, for you will overtake them." (Joshua 2:4, 5) Imagine Rahab watching the faces of the king's emissaries. Did she wonder if they could tell that her heart was racing?

Her ruse worked! The king's men hurried off in the direction of the fords of the Jordan. (Joshua 2:7) Rahab must have breathed a quiet sigh of relief. Using simple strategy, she had misdirected murderous men who had no right to the truth and she had saved innocent servants of Jehovah.

Rahab hurried back to her roof and told the two spies what she had done. She also revealed a vital fact: Her people had lost heart and were terrified of the invaders. This piece of good news must have thrilled the spies. Those wicked Canaanites were becoming terrified of the power of Israel's God, Jehovah! Rahab then revealed something of even greater importance to us. She said: "Jehovah your God is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath." (Joshua 2:11)

Rahab hid two servants of Jehovah under stalks of flax, thereby risking her life



The reports she had heard about Jehovah were enough to teach her at least this much: Israel's God was worthy of her trust. She put her faith in Jehovah.

To Rahab, there was no question that Jehovah would give his people the victory. So she begged for mercy, pleading that she and her family be spared. The spies agreed, stipulating that Rahab must keep their secret and must hang a scarlet cord from her window in the city wall so that the soldiers could protect her and her family.—Joshua 2:12-14, 18.

We can learn an essential truth about faith from Rahab. As the Bible puts it, “faith follows the thing heard.” (Romans 10:17) She heard reliable reports about the power and the justice of Jehovah God, so she put her faith and trust in him. Today, we have far more knowledge about Jehovah available to us. Will we seek to get to know him and put faith in him based on what we learn in his Word, the Bible?

### A MIGHTY CITADEL FALLS

Following Rahab's advice, the two spies clambered down the wall by means of a rope hanging from her window and then slipped off toward the mountains. There were many caves along the steep slopes to the north of Jericho where the spies could hide until it was safe to return to the Israelite camp with the good news that they had acquired from Rahab.

Later, the people of Jericho surely shook with fear when they learned that Jehovah had miraculously stopped up the Jordan River, allowing Israel to cross over on the dry riverbed. (Joshua 3:14-17) But for Rahab, that news only gave more proof that her faith in Jehovah was well-placed.

Then came the long days of Israel's marches around Jericho—six days, one march each day. Now the seventh day was here, and it was different. As mentioned at the outset of this article, the march began at sunrise, and after the army had circled the city once, it kept going, marching around Jericho again and again. (Joshua 6:15) What were the Israelites doing?

Finally, at the end of the seventh march on that seventh day, the army stopped. The horns stopped. Silence hung in the air. The tension in that city must have been almost palpable. Then, on a signal from Joshua, the army of Israel raised their voices for the first time, letting out a mighty shout. Did the guards atop the wall of Jericho think that this was some strange sort of attack, this mere cry? If so, they did not think so for long. The massive wall began to tremble under their feet. It shook, it cracked, and then it fell—crashing to the ground! As the dust cleared, though, one segment of the wall emerged intact. Rahab's house still stood, a solitary monument to one woman's faith. Imagine her feelings when she saw how Jehovah had shielded her!\*

Her family was safe!—Joshua 6:10, 16, 20, 21.

Jehovah's people likewise honored the faith of Rahab. When they saw that one house sticking up from the ruined wall like a lone tooth, they knew that Jehovah was with this woman. She and her family were spared the execution that came upon that evil city. After the battle, Rahab was allowed to dwell near the encampment of Israel. In time, Rahab became part of the Jewish people. She married a man named Salmon. Their son, Boaz, grew up to be a man of remarkable faith. He married Ruth the Moabitess.<sup>#</sup> (Ruth 4:13, 22) King David and later the Messiah himself, Jesus Christ, descended from that outstanding family.—Joshua 6:22-25; Matthew 1:5, 6, 16.

Rahab's story shows that none of us are insignificant to Jehovah. He sees us all, he reads our hearts, and he is delighted when he finds a spark of faith like the one that lit up the heart of Rahab. Her faith moved her to action. As the Bible says, she was “declared righteous by works.” (James 2:25) How wise we would be to imitate her faith! ■

\* Interestingly, Jehovah respected the agreement the two spies had made with Rahab.

<sup>#</sup> To learn more about Ruth and Boaz, see the “Imitate Their Faith” articles in the July 1 and October 1, 2012, issues of *The Watchtower*.



# He Endured in the Face of Injustice

**E**LIJAH walked along the Jordan Valley. He had been journeying for weeks, making his way north from distant Mount Horeb. Now, back in Israel at last, he could see changes in his homeland. The effects of the long drought were starting to fade. The soft autumn rains had begun to fall, and farmers were out plowing their fields. It may have brought a measure of peace to the prophet's heart to see the land healing, but it was the people he cared about most. Spiritually, they were far from well. The plague of Baal worship was still prevalent among them, and Elijah had much work to do.\*

Near the town of Abel-meholah, Elijah saw a large-scale farming project under way. There were twenty-four oxen yoked in pairs, and the 12 teams were plowing in tandem, drawing parallel furrows in the damp soil. The man driving the last team was the one Elijah was seeking. It was Elisha, the man Jehovah had selected as Elijah's successor. Elijah had once thought that he was alone in his loyalty to God, so he was no doubt eager to meet this man.—1 Kings 18:22; 19:14-19.

Did Elijah also feel a bit hesitant about delegating some of his responsibilities, sharing his privileges, or someday being replaced? We cannot say; nor can we rule out the possibility that such concerns crossed his mind. He was, after all,

\* Jehovah had used a three-and-a-half-year drought to expose the powerlessness of Baal, who was worshipped as a bringer of rain and fertility to the land. (1 Kings, chapter 18) See the "Imitate Their Faith" articles in the January 1 and April 1, 2008, issues of *The Watchtower*.



"a man with feelings like ours." (James 5:17) In any case, the Bible record states: "Elijah went over to him and threw his official garment on him." (1 Kings 19:19) Elijah's official garment—likely of sheepskin or goatskin—was worn as a cloak and signified his special appointment from Jehovah. Throwing it over Elisha's shoulders, then, was a gesture full of meaning. Elijah willingly submitted to Jehovah's command to appoint Elisha as his successor. Elijah trusted his God and obeyed him.

The younger man, for his part, was eager to help the older prophet. Elisha was not to succeed Elijah right away. Rather, for about six years, he humbly accompanied the older prophet and assisted him, later being known as the one "who used to pour out water on the hands of Elijah." (2 Kings 3:11) How comforting for Elijah to have such a capable, helpful attendant! The two men likely became fast friends. Their mutual encouragement surely helped both of them to endure despite seeing the terrible injustices prevalent in the land. In particular, the wickedness of the king, Ahab, was going from bad to worse.

Do you ever face injustice? Most of us do in this corrupt world. Finding a friend who loves God can help you to endure. You can also learn much from Elijah's faith when dealing with injustice.

## **"GET UP, GO DOWN TO MEET AHAB"**

Elijah and Elisha worked hard to build up the people spiritually. Evidently they took the lead in training other prophets, who may have been

organized into schools of some kind. In time, though, Elijah received a new assignment from Jehovah: “Get up, go down to meet Ahab the king of Israel.” (1 Kings 21:18) What had Ahab done?

The king was already an apostate, the worst of Israel’s kings up to that point. He had married Jezebel and had caused Baal worship to flourish in the land, with the king himself taking part. (1 Kings 16:31-33) Baalism included fertility rites, ritual prostitution, and even child sacrifice. Further, Ahab had recently disobeyed a command from Jehovah to execute the wicked Syrian King Ben-hadad. Ahab’s refusal evidently had to do with the prospect of monetary gain. (1 Kings, chapter 20) Now, though, the greed, materialism, and violence of Ahab and Jezebel sank to new depths.

Ahab had a palace in Samaria—and quite a colossal structure it was! He also had a palace in Jezreel, some 23 miles (37 km) away. Adjacent to

this second residence lay a vineyard. Ahab coveted that bit of land, which belonged to a man named Naboth. Ahab summoned him and offered to give him money or to trade for the vineyard. Naboth, though, said: “It is unthinkable, from Jehovah’s standpoint, for me to give you the inheritance of my forefathers.” (1 Kings 21:3) Was Naboth stubborn? Reckless? Many have assumed so. In fact, he was obeying the Law of Jehovah, which did not allow Israelites permanently to sell land that was the hereditary possession of their family. (Leviticus 25:23-28) To Naboth, it was unthinkable to break God’s Law. He was a man of faith and courage, for he surely knew that it was dangerous to stand up to Ahab.

Ahab, of course, thought nothing of Jehovah’s Law. He went home, “sullen and dejected” that he had not got his way. We read: “He lay down on his bed, kept his face turned away, and refused to eat.” (1 Kings 21:4) When Jezebel saw her husband pouting like a petulant child, she swiftly hatched a scheme to get him what he wanted—and also, in the process, to destroy a righteous family.

It is hard to read of her plot without feeling astonished by its wickedness. Queen Jezebel knew that God’s Law required the testimony of two witnesses for a serious charge to be substantiated. (Deuteronomy 19:15) So she wrote letters in Ahab’s name, directing prominent men of Jezreel to find two men willing to launch a false accusation against Naboth—that of blasphemy, which carried the death penalty. Her plan worked only too well. Two “good-for-nothing men” testified falsely against Naboth, and he was stoned to death as a result. Not only that—Naboth’s sons were killed as well!\* (1 Kings 21:5-14; Leviticus

\* If Jezebel feared that ownership of the vineyard would pass to Naboth’s heirs, she may have felt driven to arrange for the murder of Naboth’s sons. For a discussion of why God allows such acts of oppression, see the article “Our Readers Ask” in this issue.

Elijah humbly appointed Elisha as his successor



24:16; 2 Kings 9:26) Ahab had, in effect, abdicated his headship, allowing his wife to run rampant and destroy those innocent people.

Imagine Elijah's feelings when Jehovah revealed to him what the king and queen had done. It can be very discouraging when wicked people seem to triumph over the innocent. (Psalm 73:3-5, 12, 13) Today, we often see terrible injustices done—sometimes even by powerful men who claim to act as God's representatives. We may find comfort in this account, though. The Bible here reminds us that nothing is hidden from Jehovah. He sees all. (Hebrews 4:13) And what does he do about the wicked acts that he sees?

#### **“SO YOU HAVE FOUND ME, O MY ENEMY!”**

Jehovah sent Elijah to Ahab. Pointedly, God said: “There he is in the vineyard of Naboth.” (1 Kings 21:18) When Jezebel told Ahab that the vineyard was now his, he got right up and went to enjoy his new acquisition. It never occurred to him that Jehovah was watching. Imagine his expression as he lingered in that vineyard, his head full of dreams about the wondrous garden he would make of the place. But, suddenly, Elijah

appeared! Ahab's blissful countenance changed, twisted with rage and hatred, as he spat out the words: “So you have found me, O my enemy!” —1 Kings 21:20.

Ahab's words reveal two kinds of folly. First, in saying, “So you have found me” to Elijah, Ahab revealed that he was spiritually blind. Jehovah had already “found” him. He had seen Ahab abuse the gift of free will and enjoy the fruitage of Jezebel's wicked plot. God saw into Ahab's heart, where love for a material possession had eclipsed any sense of mercy, justice, or compassion. Second, in saying to Elijah, “O my enemy!” Ahab revealed his hatred for a man who was a friend of Jehovah God and who could have helped Ahab turn from his disastrous course.

We may learn vital lessons from Ahab's folly. We must ever remember that Jehovah God sees all. As a loving Father, he knows when we stray from the path of what is right, and he is eager to see us change our ways. To help us, he often uses his friends—faithful humans who, like Elijah, bear God's words to their fellow humans. What a mistake it would be to view God's friends as our enemies!—Psalm 141:5.

“So you have found me, O my enemy!”





Picture Elijah answering Ahab: "I have found you." He found Ahab for what he was—a thief, a murderer, and a rebel against Jehovah God. What courage it took for him to stand up to that wicked man! Elijah went on to pronounce God's sentence on Ahab. Jehovah saw the whole picture—wickedness was spreading out from the family of Ahab and infecting the people. So Elijah told Ahab that God had ordained "a clean sweep," the extermination of that entire dynasty. Jezebel too would be brought to justice.—1 Kings 21:20-26.

Elijah did not cynically assume that people simply get away with wicked, unjust conduct. That is an easy assumption to make in today's world. This Bible account reminds us not only that Jehovah God sees what is going on but also that he brings about justice in his due time. His Word assures us that the day is coming when he will put an end to all injustice for all time! (Psalm 37:10, 11) You may wonder, though: 'Do God's judgments involve only punishment? Are they also merciful?'

#### **"HAVE YOU SEEN HOW AHAB HAS HUMBLLED HIMSELF?"**

Perhaps Elijah was surprised at Ahab's reaction to the divine judgment. The account reads: "As soon as Ahab heard these words, he ripped his garments apart and put sackcloth on his body; and he went on a fast and kept lying down in sackcloth and walking despondently." (1 Kings 21:27) Was Ahab repenting of his ways?

We can at least say that it was a move in the right direction. Ahab was humbling himself—surely a difficult thing for a proud, arrogant man to do. But was it true repentance? Consider, by comparison, a later king who may have exceeded Ahab in wickedness—Manasseh. When Jehovah punished Manasseh, the man humbled himself, calling out to Jehovah for help. But he went further. He then turned his life course around by getting rid of the idolatrous images that he had set up, making efforts to serve Jehovah, and even encouraging his people to do the same. (2 Chron-

icles 33:1-17) Do we see such actions on Ahab's part? Sadly, no.

Did Jehovah notice that Ahab made that public display of his sadness? Jehovah said to Elijah: "Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself on my account? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the calamity during his lifetime. I will bring the calamity upon his house in the days of his son." (1 Kings 21:29) Was Jehovah forgiving Ahab? No, only true repentance would have elicited such divine mercy. (Ezekiel 33:14-16) But since Ahab showed a measure of regret, Jehovah responded with a corresponding measure of mercy. Ahab would be spared the horrific experience of seeing his entire family destroyed.

Still, Jehovah's judgment of the man stood. Jehovah later consulted with his angels about the best way to fool Ahab into joining the battle that would end his life. Soon thereafter, Jehovah's sentence on Ahab was carried out. Wounded in battle, Ahab bled to death in his chariot. The account adds this grim detail: When the royal chariot was washed out, some of the dogs licked up the king's blood. In this public way, Jehovah's words that Elijah delivered to Ahab were fulfilled: "In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, the dogs will lick up your own blood."—1 Kings 21:19; 22:19-22, 34-38.

For Elijah, Elisha, and all other faithful ones among God's people, Ahab's end provided a reassuring reminder that Jehovah did not forget Naboth's courage and faith. The God of justice never fails to bring punishment for wickedness, whether it is sooner or later; nor does he fail to include mercy in his judgment if there is a basis for doing so. (Numbers 14:18) What a powerful lesson that was for Elijah, who had endured for decades under the rule of that wicked king! Have you been a victim of injustice? Do you long to see God set matters right? You do well to imitate the faith of Elijah. With his faithful companion Elisha, he kept on proclaiming God's messages, enduring in the face of injustice! ■

# She Survived the Sword of Grief

MARY sank to her knees, her agony too deep for words. Still echoing in her ears was her son's last outcry as he died after hours of torment. The sky had gone dark at midday. Now the earth shook violently. (Matthew 27:45, 51) It may have seemed to Mary that Jehovah himself was letting the world know that he, more than anyone else, was deeply hurt by the death of Jesus Christ.

As the afternoon light dispelled the gloom shrouding Golgotha, or Skull Place, Mary grieved for her son. (John 19:17, 25) Memories likely flooded her mind. One that may have surfaced was a recollection from some 33 years earlier. When she and Joseph had just presented their precious baby at the temple in Jerusalem, an aged man named Simeon was inspired to utter a prophecy. He foretold great things for Jesus, but he added that one day, Mary would come to feel as if she were run through by a long sword. (Luke 2:25-35) Only now, in this tragic hour, did she fully grasp the truth of those words.

It has been said that the death of one's own child is the worst, the most painful, loss that a human can face. Death is a terrible enemy, and it wounds all of us in one way or another. (Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:26) Is it possible to survive such wounds? As we consider Mary's life from the start of Jesus' ministry to the time of his death and just beyond, we will learn much about the faith that helped Mary to survive the sword of grief.

## “DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU”

Let us go back three and a half years: Mary sensed that change was coming. Even in the little town of Nazareth, people were talking about John the Baptist and his stirring message of repentance. Mary could see that her eldest son viewed the news as a signal; it was time to embark on his ministry. (Matthew 3:1, 13) For Mary and her household, Jesus' absence would mean an upheaval of sorts. Why?

It seems likely that Mary's husband, Joseph, had already died. If so, Mary was no stranger to loss.\* Jesus was now called not only “the carpenter's son” but also “the carpenter.” Evidently, Jesus had taken over his father's business and had assumed the role of provider for the family, which included at least six children who were born after him. (Matthew 13:55, 56; Mark 6:3) Even if Jesus had been training James—likely the next oldest son—to carry on the trade, the departure of the eldest would not be easy for the family. Mary already bore a heavy load; did she dread this transition? We can only guess. But here is a more important question: How would she respond when Jesus of Nazareth became Jesus Christ, the long-promised Messiah? One Bible account reveals something in that regard.—John 2:1-12.

\* After figuring in an incident that occurred when Jesus was 12 years old, Joseph is absent from the Gospel record. Thereafter, Jesus' mother and her other children appear but not Joseph. Jesus is once called “the son of Mary” with no reference to Joseph.—Mark 6:3.



Jesus went to John to get baptized, then became God's Anointed One, or Messiah. (Luke 3: 21, 22) Then he began to select his disciples. Urgent though his work was, he still took time for happy occasions with family and friends. Along with his mother, his disciples, and his fleshly brothers, he went to a wedding feast at Cana, which was evidently a hilltop town some eight miles (13 km) from Nazareth. During the festivities, Mary became aware of a problem. Perhaps she noticed that some among the family of the couple exchanged panicky glances and urgent whispers. They had run out of wine! In their culture, such a lapse of customary hospitality would shame the family, marring the occasion terribly. Mary felt for them, and she turned to Jesus.

"They have no wine," she told her son. What did she expect him to do? We can only imagine, but she knew that her son was a great man who would do great things. Perhaps she hoped he would start now. In effect, she was saying to him, "Son, please do something about this!" Jesus' reply must have surprised her. He said: "Woman, why is that of concern to me and to you?" Jesus' words contained no disrespect, although they have been misinterpreted that way. His words

did, however, convey a gentle reproof. Jesus was reminding his mother that she really did not have a say in the way he directed his ministry; that was reserved for his Father, Jehovah.

Mary accepted her son's correction, for she was a sensitive and humble woman. She turned to those serving at the feast and said simply: "Do whatever he tells you." Mary saw that it was no longer her place to direct her son; rather, she and others should take direction from him. For his part, Jesus showed that he shared his mother's compassion for this newly married couple. He performed the first of his miracles, turning water into fine wine. The result? "His disciples put their faith in him." Mary too put her faith in Jesus. She looked at him not just as her son but as her Lord and Savior.

Parents today can learn much from Mary's faith. Granted, no one else has ever raised a child quite like Jesus. But when any child, however imperfect, becomes an adult, the transition may present challenges. A parent might tend to continue treating a son or daughter as a young child, though such treatment may no longer be appropriate. (1 Corinthians 13:11) How can a parent be helpful to grown offspring? One way is to express sincere confidence that a faithful son or daughter will continue to apply Bible teachings and receive Jehovah's blessing as a result. A parent's humble expressions of faith and confidence may do grown children much good. Jesus no doubt cherished Mary's support during the eventful years that followed.

#### **"HIS BROTHERS WERE . . . NOT EXERCISING FAITH IN HIM"**

The Gospels tell us relatively little about Mary during the three and a half years of Jesus' ministry. Keep in mind, though, that she was likely a widow—a single mother at that, perhaps with young ones still at home. It is quite understandable if she was unable to follow Jesus as he preached throughout his homeland. (1 Timothy 5:8) Still, she continued to meditate on spiritual things that she had learned about the Messiah

Mary was stabbed to the heart by grief





and to attend meetings in her local synagogue as had always been the family custom.—Luke 2:19, 51; 4:16.

Is it not possible, then, that she was sitting in the audience when Jesus spoke at the synagogue in Nazareth? What a thrill for her to hear her son announce that a centuries-old Messianic prophecy was now fulfilled in him! It must have been distressing, though, to see that her fellow Nazarenes did not accept her son. They even tried to kill him!—Luke 4:17-30.

Also distressing was the way her other sons responded to Jesus. We learn at John 7:5 that Jesus' four brothers did not have their mother's faith. We read: "His brothers were . . . not exercising faith in him." As to Jesus' sisters—of whom there were at least two—the Bible is silent.\* In any event, Mary came to know the peculiar pain of living in a home where differing religious viewpoints prevailed. She had to strive for the balance of remaining loyal to divine truth while working to win over the hearts of her family members without being overbearing or combative.

On one occasion, a group of relatives—no doubt including Jesus' brothers—decided to go and "seize" Jesus. They were actually saying: "He has gone out of his mind." (Mark 3:21, 31) Mary, of course, thought no such thing, but she went with her sons, perhaps in the hope that they would learn something that would help them to grow in faith. Did they? Although Jesus kept performing astounding works and teaching wonderful truths, Mary's other sons still did not believe. Did she wonder, in near exasperation, just what it would take to reach their hearts?

Do you live in a religiously divided home? Mary's faith can teach you a great deal. She did not give up on her unbelieving relatives. Rather, she chose to let them see that her faith brought her joy and peace of mind. On the other hand, she remained supportive of her faithful son. Did she miss Jesus? Did she at times wish that he

\* Joseph was not Jesus' biological father, so these siblings were technically Jesus' half brothers and half sisters.—Matthew 1:20.



Many of Jesus' illustrations show the influence of his training by Joseph and Mary

were still at home with her and her family? If so, she kept such feelings in check. She saw it as a privilege to be supportive and encouraging to Jesus. Can you likewise help your children to put God first in life?

### **"A LONG SWORD WILL BE RUN THROUGH YOU"**

Was Mary's faith in Jesus rewarded? Jehovah never fails to reward faith, and surely Mary's case was no exception. (Hebrews 11:6) Just imagine what it was like for her to hear her son speak or to hear reports of his sermons from others who heard them firsthand.

In her son's illustrations, did Mary detect some echoes of Jesus' childhood as he was growing up in Nazareth? When Jesus spoke of a woman sweeping her house to find a lost coin, grinding flour for bread, or lighting a lamp and setting it atop a stand, did Mary think of that little boy who had been at her side as she carried out such daily tasks? (Luke 11:33; 15:8, 9; 17:35) When Jesus said that his yoke was kindly and his load light, did Mary think back on some golden afternoon long ago when she watched Joseph teach a young Jesus how to make and shape a yoke with care so that an animal could bear it in comfort? (Matthew 11:30) Surely Mary found immense satis-

faction in contemplating the privilege that Jehovah had given her in life—that of helping to raise and train the son who would become the Messiah. She must have found unique joy in listening to Jesus, the greatest of human teachers, who took such commonplace objects and scenes and drew from them the most profound of lessons!

Yet, Mary remained humble. Her son never set her up for adulation, let alone worshipful devotion. During his ministry, a woman in the crowd cried out that Jesus' mother must truly be happy for giving birth to him. He replied: "No, rather, happy are those hearing the word of God and keeping it!" (Luke 11:27, 28) And when some in a crowd pointed out to Jesus that his mother and his brothers were near, he said that those who believed were really his mothers and brothers. Far from taking offense, Mary surely understood Jesus' point—spiritual ties are far more important than fleshly ones.—Mark 3:32-35.

Still, what words could convey the pain that Mary felt as she saw her son suffer a terrible death on a torture stake? An eyewitness to the execution, the apostle John, later included this telling detail in his account: During the ordeal, Mary was standing "by the torture stake of Jesus." Nothing could prevent that loyal, loving mother from standing by her son to the very last. Jesus saw her, and though every breath he drew was an agony and every word he uttered cost him dearly, he spoke. He placed his mother in the care

of his beloved apostle John. Since Jesus' fleshly brothers were still unbelievers, Jesus entrusted Mary to none of them but to a sincere follower of his. Jesus thus showed how important it is for a man of faith to care for those who are his own, especially when it comes to their spiritual needs.—John 19:25-27.

When Jesus' death at last came, Mary felt the pain foretold so long ago, the piercing long sword of grief. If we find it hard to imagine the extent of her grief, how much more so are we at a loss to imagine the joy she felt three days later! Mary learned of the greatest of all miracles—Jesus had been resurrected! And her joy was compounded, for Jesus later appeared to his half brother James, no doubt in private. (1 Corinthians 15:7) That meeting affected James and Jesus' other half brothers as well. We later learn that they came to believe in Jesus as the Christ. Soon, they were at Christian meetings with their mother, "persisting in prayer." (Acts 1:14) Two of them, James and Jude, later wrote books of the Bible.

We find the last mention of Mary at the meetings with her sons, praying. What a fitting end to Mary's record, and what an example she left behind! Because of her faith, she survived the sword of grief and received, at last, a glorious reward. If we imitate her faith, we too will survive whatever wounds this hard world inflicts on us and we will enjoy rewards greater than we can imagine. ■

Mary was delighted to see her other sons become loyal Christians





## “Please Listen to This Dream”

JOSEPH looked longingly toward the east, wishing he could break away from the caravan and make a run for it. Somewhere beyond those hills, at no great distance, lay his home in Hebron. His father, Jacob, would be settling in for the evening, utterly unaware of what had befallen his favorite son. But Joseph could not get to him now; for all the young man knew, he might never see that dear old face again. The traders eyed him as they urged their camels along the well-worn track of the road heading south. They owned Joseph now, and they would not let him out of their sight. To them, this boy was like their precious cargo of fragrant gums and oils—valued merchandise that would fetch a profit in faraway Egypt.

Joseph could not have been much more than 17 years old. Imagine him turning to squint into the western sky, where the sun was nearing the horizon of the Great Sea, as he tried to fathom how his world had fallen apart. It was hard to believe that his own brothers had come close to murdering him and had then sold him as a slave. It must have been a struggle for Joseph to hold back his tears. He could not guess what his future would hold.

How did Joseph get into such a terrible predicament? And what can we learn from the faith of a young man who was victimized and rejected by members of his own family?

### A COMPLICATED FAMILY BACKGROUND

Joseph came from a very large family—but not a happy and united one. The Bible’s portrait of Jacob’s family stands as vivid proof of the negative effects of polygamy—an entrenched practice that God tolerated among his people until his Son restored the original standard of monogamy. (Matthew 19:4-6) Jacob had at least 14 children by four different women—his two wives, Leah and Rachel, and their maidservants, Zilpah and Bilhah. From the start, Jacob was in love with his beautiful Rachel. He never felt such an attachment to Leah, Rachel’s older sister, whom he had been tricked into marrying. A bitter rivalry persisted between the two women, and that jealousy car-





ried over to the children of the household.—Genesis 29:16-35; 30:1, 8, 19, 20; 37:35.

Rachel was barren for a long time, and when she finally gave birth to Joseph, Jacob treated this son of his old age as special. For example, when the family were on their way to a dangerous meeting with Jacob's murderous brother, Esau, Jacob made sure that Rachel and little Joseph were given the safest position at the rear of the household group. That tense day must have made a deep impression on Joseph. Imagine how he felt that morning as he wondered, wide-eyed, why his aged but vigorous father was now walking with a limp. How amazed he must have been to learn the reason: His father had struggled the night before with a mighty angel! And why? Because Jacob wanted a blessing from Jehovah God. Jacob's reward was the change of his name to Israel. A whole nation would bear his name! (Genesis 32:22-31) In time, Joseph learned that the sons of Israel were to father the tribes of that nation!

Later, young Joseph faced tragedy firsthand when the dearest person in his young life left him all too soon. His mother died while giving birth to his younger brother, Benjamin. His father grieved deeply over the loss. Imagine Jacob gently wiping the tears from Joseph's eyes, comforting him with the same hope that had once comforted Jacob's grandfather Abraham. How

touched Joseph must have been to learn that Jehovah would one day restore his mother to life! Perhaps Joseph came to have even deeper love for the generous "God . . . of the living." (Luke 20:38; Hebrews 11:17-19) In the wake of the loss of his wife, Jacob always had tender feelings for those two boys, his sons by Rachel.—Genesis 35:18-20; 37:3; 44:27-29.

Many children would be spoiled or corrupted by such special treatment; but Joseph learned from the many good qualities of his parents, and he developed strong faith as well as a keen sense of right and wrong. At the age of 17, he was working as a shepherd, assisting some of his older brothers, when he noticed some wrongdoing on their part. Was he tempted to keep the matter quiet so as to gain their favor? In any case, he did what was right. He reported the matter to his father. (Genesis 37:2) Perhaps that brave act confirmed Jacob's high opinion of this beloved son. What an excellent example for Christian youths to think about! When tempted to conceal the serious sin of another—perhaps a sibling or a friend—it is wise to imitate Joseph and make sure that the matter is known to those who are in a position to help the wrongdoer.—Leviticus 5:1.

We can also take a lesson from Joseph's family life. While true Christians today are free from the practice of polygamy, there are nonetheless

Joseph lost his freedom but not his faith



many blended families among them, with step-parents, stepchildren, and stepsiblings. All can learn from Jacob's family that favoritism and partiality undermine family unity. Wise parents with blended families do all they can to convince their children and stepchildren that each one is loved and is blessed with unique gifts and that each one can add to the happiness of the family. —Romans 2:11.

### JEALOUSY TAKES ROOT

Perhaps because of Joseph's courageous stand for what was right, Jacob bestowed an honor on the boy. He had a special garment made for his son. (Genesis 37:3) It has often been called a striped coat or a coat of many colors, but there is scant evidence for such renderings. Likely, it was a long, elegant robe, perhaps reaching to the extremities of the arms and legs. It was probably the kind of garb that a nobleman or a prince might wear.

Jacob surely meant well, and Joseph must have been touched by this sign of his father's regard and affection. But that garment would bring him a great deal of trouble. For one thing, remember that the boy worked as a shepherd. That meant rugged manual labor. Imagine the youth wearing such a regal garment while trudging through long grass, climbing over rocks, or trying to disentangle a lost lamb from a thornbush. Worse, though, how would this sign of Jacob's special favor affect Joseph's relationship with his brothers?

The Bible answers: "When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they began to hate him, and they could not speak peaceably to him."<sup>\*</sup> (Genesis 37:4) Their jealousy may be understandable, but Joseph's brothers were unwise to give in to that

<sup>\*</sup> Some researchers suggest that Joseph's brothers interpreted their father's gift to Joseph as evidence that he intended to confer the right of the firstborn on this boy. They knew that Joseph was the first son of Jacob's favored wife—the one he had intended to marry first. Further, Jacob's firstborn, Reuben, had lain down with his father's concubine, disgracing his father and effectively forfeiting his own birthright.—Genesis 35:22; 49:3, 4.



Jacob favored Joseph because his son was faithful and righteous

poisonous emotion. (Proverbs 14:30; 27:4) Have you ever found yourself seething with envy when someone received attention or honor that you wanted? Remember Joseph's brothers. Their jealousy led them to commit deeds that they would come to regret deeply. Their example serves to remind Christians that it is far wiser to "rejoice with those who rejoice."—Romans 12:15.

Joseph surely sensed his brothers' animosity. So did he stash his fancy robe out of sight when his brothers were near? He might have been tempted to do so. Remember, though, that Jacob wanted the robe to be a sign of favor and love. Joseph wanted to live up to his father's trust in him, so he loyally wore the garment. His example is useful for us. Although our own heavenly Father is never partial, he does at times single out

his loyal servants and favor them. Furthermore, he asks them to stand out as different from this corrupt and immoral world. Like Joseph's special robe, the conduct of true Christians makes them different from those around them. Such conduct sometimes incites jealousy and animosity. (1 Peter 4:4) Should a Christian hide his true identity as a servant of God? No—no more than Joseph should have hidden his robe.—Luke 11:33.

## JOSEPH'S DREAMS

It was not long before Joseph had two extraordinary dreams. In the first dream, Joseph saw himself and his brothers, each binding a sheaf of grain. But then his brothers' sheaves encircled his sheaf and bowed down to it as it stood erect. In the second dream, the sun, the moon, and 11 stars were bowing down to Joseph. (Genesis 37:6, 7, 9) What should Joseph do about those strange and vivid dreams?

The dreams came from Jehovah God. They were prophetic in nature, and God meant for Joseph to pass along the message they contained. In a sense, Joseph was to do what all the later prophets did when they related God's messages and judgments to His wayward people.

Joseph tactfully said to his brothers: "Please listen to this dream that I had." His brothers understood the dream, and they did not like it one bit. They answered: "Are you really going to make yourself king over us and dominate us?" The account adds: "So they found another reason to hate him, because of his dreams and what he said." When Joseph related the second dream to his father as well as his brothers, the reaction was not much better. We read: "His father rebuked him and said to him: 'What is the meaning of this dream of yours? Am I as well as your mother and your brothers really going to come and bow down to the earth to you?'" However, Jacob kept thinking the matter over. Might Jehovah be communicating with the boy?—Genesis 37:6, 8, 10, 11.

Joseph was neither the first nor the last servant of Jehovah to be asked to relay a prophetic

message that would prove to be unpopular and even lead to persecution. Jesus was the greatest of such message bearers, and he told his followers: "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." (John 15:20) Christians of all ages may learn much from the faith and courage of young Joseph.

## HATRED COMES TO A HEAD

Not long afterward, Jacob sent young Joseph on a journey. The older sons were tending the flocks up north near Shechem, where they had recently made bitter enemies. Naturally, Jacob was concerned about his sons, so he sent Joseph to check on their welfare. Can you imagine Joseph's feelings? He knew that his brothers hated him more than ever! How would they like it when he came to them as their father's spokesman? Nonetheless, Joseph obediently set out.—Genesis 34:25-30; 37:12-14.

It was quite a trek—in all, perhaps four or five days of walking. Shechem lay about 50 miles (80 km) to the north of Hebron. But at Shechem, Joseph learned that his brothers had moved on to Dothan, which lay another 14 miles (22 km) or so to the north. When Joseph finally neared Dothan, his brothers saw him coming from a distance. Immediately their hatred boiled to the surface. The account reads: "They said to one another: 'Look! Here comes that dreamer. Come, now, let us kill him and pitch him into one of the waterpits, and we will say that a vicious wild animal devoured him. Then let us see what will become of his dreams.'" Reuben, however, persuaded his brothers to throw Joseph into a pit alive, hoping that he could rescue the boy later on.—Genesis 37:19-22.

Unsuspecting, Joseph approached them, no doubt hoping for a peaceful meeting. Instead, his brothers attacked him! Roughly, they stripped off his special robe, dragged him to a dried-out waterpit, and pushed him in. Down Joseph fell! Recovering from the shock, he struggled to his feet, but he could never climb out on his own. He



saw only a circle of sky as his brothers' voices receded. He cried out to them, pleading, but they ignored him. Callously, they ate a meal nearby. While Reuben was absent, they again considered killing the boy, but Judah persuaded them to sell him to passing merchants instead. Dothan was near the trade route to Egypt, and it was not long before a caravan of Ishmaelites and Midianites came by. Before Reuben returned, the deed was done. For 20 shekels, they had sold their brother as a slave.\*—Genesis 37:23-28; 42:21.

So we find ourselves back at our starting point. As Joseph was taken south along the road to Egypt, he seemed to have lost everything. He was cut off! For years, he would know nothing of his family—nothing of Reuben's anguish when he returned to find Joseph gone; nothing of Jacob's

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\* Even in this minute detail, the Bible record proves accurate. Documents from the same time period reveal that 20 shekels was the going price for slaves in Egypt.

grief when he was deceived into believing that his beloved Joseph was dead; nothing of his aged grandfather Isaac, who still lived; and nothing of his beloved younger brother, Benjamin, whom he would miss dearly. But was Joseph left with nothing at all?—Genesis 37:29-35.

Joseph still had something that his brothers could never take from him: faith. He knew much about his God, Jehovah, and nothing could rob him of that—not the loss of his home, not the hardships of captivity on the long journey to Egypt, and not even the humiliation of being sold as a slave to a wealthy Egyptian named Potiphar. (Genesis 37:36) Joseph's faith and his determination to stay close to his God only grew stronger through such hardships. In future articles, we will see how that faith made Joseph ever more useful to his God, Jehovah, as well as to his troubled family. How wise we would be to imitate the faith of Joseph! ■

Joseph stood up for what was right, yet his brothers hated him



# “How Could I Commit This Great Badness?”



**J**OSEPH breathed in the thick, warm air, noticing the scent of lotus blossoms and other water plants. He was being led by a caravan of traders now traversing the lowlands of the vast Nile delta. Picture a line of men leading their camels along a watercourse toward yet another Egyptian town, occasionally startling a wading heron or an ibis into flight. Joseph thought again of his home in the windswept highlands of Hebron, hundreds of miles away; he was in a different world now.

Imagine monkeys chattering and screeching from the tops of date palms and fig trees. To Joseph, the speech of the people they passed seemed hardly more intelligible. Perhaps he tried to pick up any words or phrases that he could. He might as well learn. As far as he knew, he would never see his home again.

Joseph was scarcely more than a boy—17 or 18 years old—yet he faced challenges that would daunt many grown men. His own brothers, consumed with jealousy because Joseph was their father’s favorite, had come close to murdering him. Instead, they had sold him to these traders. (Genesis 37:2, 5, 18-28) Now, after journeying for weeks, the traders were likely growing more and more lighthearted as they neared the great metropolis where they intended to reap profits by selling Joseph as well as their precious wares. How did Joseph keep despair from taking root in his heart and crushing his spirit? And how can we today keep life’s challenges and setbacks

from destroying our faith? We have much to learn from Joseph.

## “JEHOVAH WAS WITH JOSEPH”

“Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and an Egyptian named Potiphar, a court official of Pharaoh and chief of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there.” (Genesis 39:1) In those few words, the Bible account helps us to imagine the humiliation of a young man as he was sold once again. He was mere property! We may think of Joseph following his new master, an Egyptian court official, through bustling city streets crowded with bazaars as they head toward Joseph’s new home.

Home! It was a far cry from anything Joseph had ever called home. He had grown up in a nomadic family who dwelled in tents as they moved frequently and tended their flocks of sheep. Here, such wealthy Egyptians as Potiphar lived in elegant, brightly painted houses. Archaeologists report that the ancient Egyptians were fond of lush, walled gardens with shade trees and quiet pools for growing papyrus, lotus, and other water plants. Some houses sat secluded within gardens, with porches for enjoying the breeze, high windows for ventilation, and many rooms, including a large dining room and quarters for servants.

Was Joseph overly impressed with such opulence? It seems unlikely. More than anything, he probably felt keenly how alone he was. The Egyptians were foreign to him in language, dress, and

grooming—and even more so in religion. They worshipped a dizzying array of gods, practiced occult and magical arts, and held a morbid fascination with death and the afterlife. One thing, though, kept Joseph from being crushed by loneliness. The Bible account tells us: “Jehovah was with Joseph.” (Genesis 39:2) Joseph surely poured out his heart to his God. The Bible says that “Jehovah is near to all those calling on him.” (Psalm 145:18) How else did Joseph draw near to his God?

The young man refused to give in to despair, and he set about doing his work as well as he could. He thus gave Jehovah much to bless, and Joseph soon gained the favor of his new master. Potiphar saw that his young servant was being blessed by Jehovah, the God of Joseph’s people, and such blessings no doubt brought more prosperity to the Egyptian’s house. Joseph gradually rose in his master’s esteem until Potiphar entrusted everything into the hands of this capable young man.—Genesis 39:3-6.

Joseph set a vital example for young people who serve God today. For instance, when they are in school, they may at times find themselves in an environment that feels strange and foreign, a world fascinated with the occult and bound up

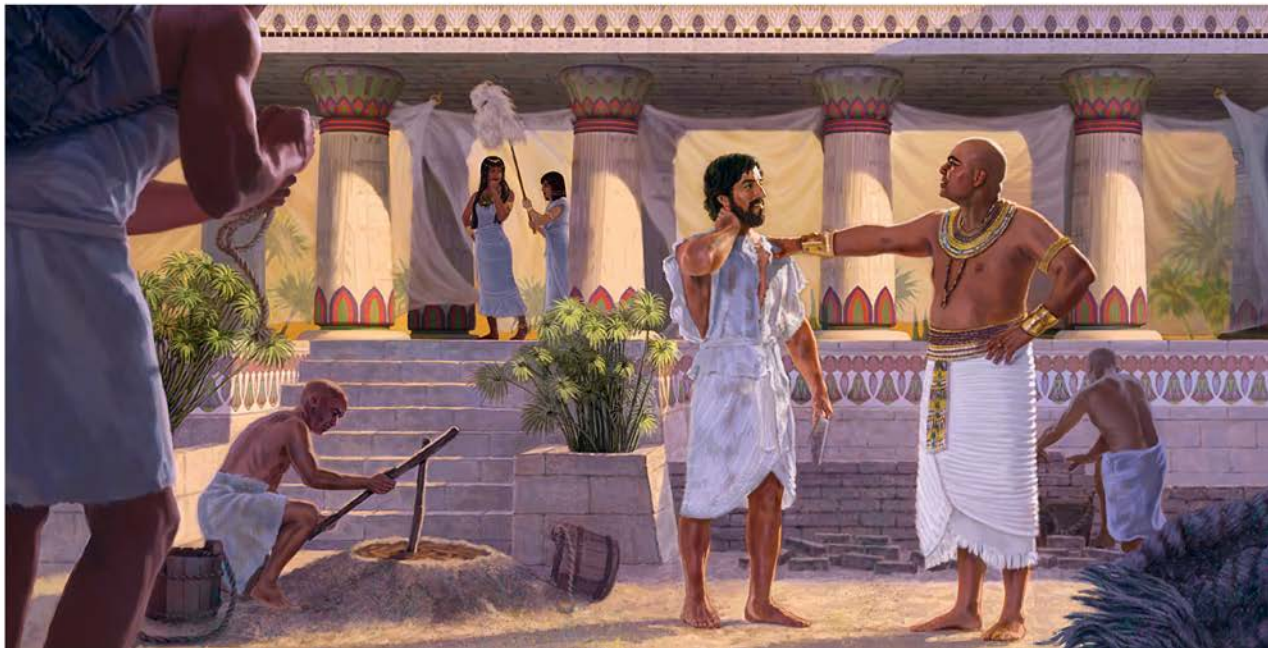
with a grim and hopeless outlook on life. If you are in that situation, remember that Jehovah has not changed. (James 1:17) He still proves to be with all those who stay loyal to him and who seek to work hard in a way that pleases him. He blesses them richly, and he will do the same for you.

In the meantime, the account tells us, Joseph was maturing. The youth became a man, and a “well-built and handsome” one at that. Those words suggest that danger was looming, for the gift of physical beauty often brings unwanted and inappropriate attention.

### “HE NEVER CONSENTED”

Joseph valued loyalty; Potiphar’s wife, though, did not. We read: “The wife of his master began to cast her eyes on Joseph and say: ‘Lie down with me.’” (Genesis 39:7) Was Joseph tempted to give in to this pagan woman’s bold advances? The Bible gives us no reason to assume that Joseph was immune to the desires and drives common to young men or that this woman, the pampered wife of a wealthy and influential court official, was physically undesirable. Would Joseph rationalize that his master would never know? Would he be tempted by the thought of the material advantages that such a liaison might offer?

Potiphar’s wife took note of loyal young Joseph





In truth, we cannot know all that passed through Joseph's mind. But we have a clear indication of what was in his heart. It shines through in his answer: "Here my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has entrusted everything he has into my care. There is no one greater in this house than I am, and he has not withheld from me anything at all except you, because you are his wife. So how could I commit this great badness and actually sin against God?" (Genesis 39:8, 9) Picture the young man speaking those words with earnest intensity. It hurt him even to contemplate the deed she wanted him to commit. Why?

As Joseph said, his master trusted him. Potiphar had put his whole household in Joseph's hands, holding back nothing but his wife. How could Joseph betray that trust? He abhorred the thought. But there was a deeper revulsion: the thought of actually sinning against his God, Jehovah. Joseph had learned much from his parents about God's view of marriage and fidelity. Jehovah performed the first marriage and made his feelings clear. Man and wife were to stick together, becoming "one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) Those who attempted to violate that bond risked incurring God's wrath. For example, the men who came close to violating the wife of Abraham, who was Joseph's great-grandmother, and the wife of Isaac, Joseph's grandmother, came perilously close to disaster. (Genesis 20:1-3; 26:7-11) Joseph had learned that lesson well, and he intended to live by it.

Potiphar's wife did not like what she heard. Why, just imagine this lowly slave turning her down, actually referring to her offer as "great badness"! Nonetheless, she persisted. Perhaps her vanity and pride were stung, making her determined to turn Joseph's no into a yes. She thus showed a spirit like that of Satan, who tempted Jesus. Satan's attempt failed too, and instead of giving up, Satan just waited for "another convenient time." (Luke 4:13) Faithful people thus need to be determined and steadfast. That was how Joseph handled himself. Though this situa-

tion went on "day after day," he would not budge. We read: "He *never* consented." (Genesis 39:10) Potiphar's wife, however, was a determined seductress.

She picked a moment when the servants were all out of the house. She knew that Joseph would have to come inside in order to do his work. When he did, she sprung her trap. Grabbing hold of his garment, she made her plea one last time: "Lie down with me!" Joseph acted quickly. Wrenching away from her grasp, he pulled back—but she held fast to his garment. He twisted free, leaving it behind in her hands. And then he fled!—Genesis 39:11, 12.

We might be reminded of the apostle Paul's inspired counsel: "Flee from sexual immorality!" (1 Corinthians 6:18) What an example Joseph set for all true Christians! Life may force us into proximity with those who have no regard for God's moral laws, but that does not mean that we have to give in to wrong influences. Whatever the cost, we must flee.

In Joseph's case, the cost was high. Potiphar's wife wanted revenge. She immediately began screaming, summoning the other servants into the house. She claimed that Joseph had attempted to rape her and had then run off when she screamed. She kept the incriminating garment and waited for her husband's return. When Potiphar came home, she presented the same lie, implying that it was all her husband's fault for bringing this foreigner into their home. Potiphar's reaction? We read: "His anger blazed"! He turned Joseph over to the prison to have him incarcerated.—Genesis 39:13-20.

#### **"WITH FETTERS THEY BOUND HIS FEET"**

We know little of what Egyptian prisons were like in those days. Archaeologists have found the ruins of such places—great fortresslike structures with cells and dungeons. Joseph later described the place with a word that literally means "the pit," which suggests a lightless and hopeless place. (Genesis 40:15, footnote) In the book of Psalms, we learn that Joseph was subjected to further torment: "With fetters they bound his



Joseph worked hard in prison, and Jehovah blessed him

feet; his neck was put in irons.” (Psalm 105:17, 18) The Egyptians sometimes put prisoners in restraints that pinioned their arms behind them at the elbows; others bore iron collars clasped at their necks. How Joseph must have suffered to be so mistreated—when he had done nothing to deserve it!

What is more, this was no brief setback. The account says that Joseph “remained there in the prison.” He spent years in that terrible place!\* And Joseph did not know if he would ever be released. As those first shocking days dragged into weeks, then months, how did he keep from falling into hopelessness and despair?

The account gives us this reassuring answer: “Jehovah continued with Joseph and kept showing loyal love to him.” (Genesis 39:21) No prison walls, no fetters, no lightless dungeons can keep Jehovah’s loyal love from reaching his servants. (Romans 8:38, 39) We may well imagine Joseph pouring out his agony to his dear heavenly Father in prayer and then receiving the kind of peace and calm that only “the God of all comfort” can provide. (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4; Philippians 4:6, 7)

\* The Bible indicates that Joseph was about 17 or 18 years old when he entered Potiphar’s house and that he remained there long enough to grow into young manhood—perhaps a few years. He was 30 when he was released from prison.—Genesis 37:2, 39:6; 41:46.

What else did Jehovah do for Joseph? We read that he kept granting Joseph “favor in the eyes of the chief officer of the prison.”

The prisoners were evidently given work to do, and Joseph again gave Jehovah something to bless. He worked hard, doing his best at whatever task was assigned him and leaving the rest to Jehovah. With Jehovah’s blessing, Joseph gained trust and respect, just as he had in Potiphar’s household. We read: “So the chief officer of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners in the prison, and everything that they were doing there, he was the one having it done. The chief officer of the prison was looking after absolutely nothing that was in Joseph’s care, for Jehovah was with Joseph and Jehovah made whatever he did successful.” (Genesis 39:22, 23) What a comfort for Joseph to know that Jehovah was caring for him!

We may come upon some devastating twists and turns in life, even some cruel injustices, but we can learn from the faith of Joseph. If we keep close to Jehovah in prayer, stay loyal to his commands, and work hard at doing what is right in his eyes, we will give him something to bless. In Joseph’s case, Jehovah had even greater blessings in store, as we shall see in future articles in this series. ■

## “Do Not Interpretations Belong to God?”

**J**OSEPH walked along the dark corridor, dripping with sweat from his toil in the stifling heat. Outside, the Egyptian sun was baking the prison like a kiln. It seemed at times as if he knew every brick in the place, every crack in every wall. This was his whole world now. True, he was highly regarded here. Nonetheless, he was a prisoner.

How often he must have cast his thoughts back to his life in the high rocky hills in Hebron, where he had tended his father’s flocks! He was about 17 years old when his father, Jacob, sent him on an errand that took him dozens of miles (km) from home. Such freedom seemed almost unimaginable now. Joseph’s jealous brothers had turned on him with murderous hatred and then sold him as a slave. He was taken down to Egypt, where he first served in the household of the Egyptian official Potiphar. Joseph held his master’s trust until a false accusation of rape from Potiphar’s wife landed him here in this prison.\* —Genesis, chapters 37, 39.

Joseph was 28 years old now, with about a decade of slavery and imprisonment behind him. To put it mildly, his life was not turning out as he had hoped. Would he ever be set free? Would he see his dear elderly father again or his beloved younger brother, Benjamin? How long would he be stuck in this pit?

\* See the “Imitate Their Faith” articles in the August 1 and November 1, 2014, issues of *The Watchtower*.



Have you ever felt as Joseph did? Sometimes life turns out to be a far cry from our youthful hopes. Indeed, painful situations can seem to drag on endlessly, and it can be hard to see a way out or a way to endure. Let us see what we can learn from the faith of Joseph.

### “JEHOVAH CONTINUED WITH JOSEPH”

Joseph knew that his God, Jehovah, never lost sight of him, and this knowledge surely helped him to endure. Even here in a foreign prison, Jehovah found ways to bless Joseph. Thus, we read: “Jehovah continued with Joseph and kept showing loyal love to him and granting him favor in the eyes of the chief officer of the prison.” (Genesis 39:21-23) As Joseph continued to work hard, he kept giving his God a basis for blessing him. How comforting it must have been for him to know that Jehovah was always with him!

Did Jehovah intend to let Joseph remain in that prison indefinitely? Joseph could only guess at the answer, and he surely kept the matter before his God in prayer. As it so often happens, the answer came in a most unexpected way. One day, there was some commotion in the prison as two new inmates arrived—officers from Pharaoh’s personal staff. One was the king’s chief baker; the other was the chief cupbearer.—Genesis 40:1-3.

The chief of the guard entrusted Joseph with the care of those two formerly prominent



men.\* One night they each had a vivid and puzzling dream. When Joseph saw them in the morning, he could tell that something was wrong. So he asked: "Why are your faces gloomy today?" (Genesis 40:3-7) Perhaps his kindly manner assured the men that it was safe for them to reveal their troubles. Joseph did not know it, but that conversation would lead to a turning point in his life. Would there have been any conversation, though, had Joseph not chosen to show a little kind concern for others? His choice may move us to ask ourselves, 'Do I express my faith in God by showing an interest in fellow humans?'

The two men explained that they were agitated by their vivid and puzzling dreams—and by the fact that they had no interpreter with them. The Egyptians placed a lot of weight on dreams and depended heavily on the men who claimed to be able to interpret them. The two men did not know that their dreams had come from Joseph's God, Jehovah. But Joseph knew. He assured them: "Do not interpretations belong to God? Relate it [the dream] to me, please." (Genesis 40:8) Joseph's

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\* The ancient Egyptians enjoyed over 90 varieties of breads and cakes. So the chief of Pharaoh's baking staff was a prominent man. And the chief cupbearer led a staff of servants who made sure that Pharaoh's wine and perhaps beer were of high quality and were kept safe from any attempt to poison the monarch—a real risk, for court intrigue and assassinations were common. It was not unusual for the cupbearer to become a trusted adviser to the king.

words resound today for all sincere students of the Bible. If only every religious person showed the same humility! We need to be willing to set aside prideful human thinking and to rely on God as we seek correct interpretations of his word.—1 Thessalonians 2:13; James 4:6.

The cupbearer went first. He told Joseph of a dream about a vine with three twigs that bore clusters of grapes. The grapes ripened, and the cupbearer squeezed the juice into Pharaoh's cup. Thanks to Jehovah, Joseph instantly knew the meaning behind the dream. He told the cupbearer that the three twigs meant three days; within that time, Pharaoh would restore the cupbearer to his former position. As relief swept over the cupbearer's features, Joseph added this request: "Please show me loyal love and mention me to Pharaoh." Joseph explained that he had been kidnapped from his home and imprisoned without just cause.—Genesis 40:9-15.

Encouraged by the good news the cupbearer had received, the baker asked Joseph the meaning of his own dream in which he had seen three baskets of bread as well as birds eating from one of the baskets on his head. The answer to this riddle was also given to Joseph. But it did not mean good news for the baker. Joseph said: "This is its interpretation: The three baskets are three days. Three days from now, Pharaoh will behead you

Joseph treated  
his fellow prisoners  
with kindness  
and dignity



and will hang you on a stake, and the birds will eat your flesh from you.” (Genesis 40:16-19) Like all of God’s faithful servants, Joseph boldly revealed God’s messages, both the good news and the news of impending judgment.—Isaiah 61:2.

Three days later, Joseph’s words came true. Pharaoh held a birthday party—a practice not found among God’s people in Bible times—and pronounced judgment on his two servants. The baker was executed, just as Joseph had foretold, whereas the cupbearer was restored to his former position. Sadly, though, that neglectful man forgot all about Joseph.—Genesis 40:20-23.

### **“I NEED NOT BE CONSIDERED!”**

Two full years passed. (Genesis 41:1) Imagine how frustrating that must have been for Joseph! Perhaps his hopes were high after Jehovah gave him the understanding of the puzzling dreams of the cupbearer and the baker. Thereafter, as each day dawned, Joseph may have awakened with renewed hope that this would be the day of his release—only to find once again that the dull routine of prison life dragged on, unchanged. Those two years might well have been the most challenging of all for Joseph to endure. Yet, he never gave up his trust in his God, Jehovah. Rather than giving in to despair, he was determined to endure, and he emerged from that trying time all the stronger.—James 1:4.

In these difficult times, who of us does not need to work on our endurance? In order to face life’s ongoing trials, we need the kind of determination, patience, and inner peace that only God can give us. As he did with Joseph, he can help us to fight despair and hold on to hope.—Romans 12:12; 15:13.

The cupbearer may have forgotten Joseph, but Jehovah never did. One night, he sent Pharaoh a pair of unforgettable dreams. In the first, the king saw seven fine-looking, fat cows emerge from the Nile River, followed by seven ugly, thin cows. The thin ones devoured the fat ones. Later, Pharaoh dreamed that he saw a stalk of grain sprouting

seven choice ears. But then another seven ears, wind-parched and sickly, sprouted up and devoured the choice ones. In the morning, Pharaoh awoke deeply agitated over the dreams, so he called on all his wise men and magic-practicing priests to interpret them. They all failed. (Genesis 41:1-8) Whether that means that they were dumbfounded or that they came up with a variety of conflicting ideas, we do not know. At any rate, Pharaoh was let down—yet he was more desperate than ever to find an answer to this puzzle.

Finally, the cupbearer remembered Joseph! His conscience stung him, and he told Pharaoh about the remarkable young man in prison who two years earlier had correctly interpreted his dream and that of the baker. Immediately, Pharaoh had Joseph summoned from prison.—Genesis 41:9-13.

Imagine Joseph’s feelings as Pharaoh’s messengers came with the royal summons. He quickly changed his clothes and shaved—likely removing all the hair from his head, for such was the Egyptian custom. No doubt he prayed fervently that Jehovah would bless him in this interview! Soon he found himself in the opulent court of the royal palace, standing before the monarch. We read: “Then Pharaoh said to Joseph: ‘I had a dream, but there is no one to interpret it. Now I have heard it said about you that you can hear a dream and interpret it.’” Joseph’s response showed, once again, both his humility and his faith in his God: “I need not be considered! God will speak concerning Pharaoh’s welfare.”—Genesis 41:14-16.

Jehovah loves humble, faithful people, so it is no wonder that he gave Joseph the answer that had eluded the wise men and priests. Joseph explained that Pharaoh’s two dreams had the same meaning. By repeating the message, Jehovah was signifying that the matter was “firmly established”—absolutely sure of fulfillment. The fat cows and the healthy ears of grain represented seven years of plenty in Egypt, while the lean cows and the sickly ears of grain pictured seven years of famine that would follow the years



Joseph humbly said to Pharaoh: "I need not be considered!"

of plenty. That famine would devour the land's abundance.—Genesis 41:25-32.

Pharaoh knew that Joseph had the answer. But what could be done? Joseph recommended a plan of action. Pharaoh needed to find a man both "discreet and wise" to oversee the gathering of the land's surplus grain into storehouses during the seven years of plenty and then to distribute that surplus to the needy during the ensuing famine. (Genesis 41:33-36) Joseph's experience and abilities more than qualified him for that job, but he did not promote himself. His humility made such a presumptuous course unthinkable; his faith made it unnecessary. If we have real faith in Jehovah, we have no need for ambition or self-promotion. We can be at peace, leaving matters in his capable hands!

### **"CAN ANOTHER MAN BE FOUND LIKE THIS ONE?"**

Pharaoh and all his servants saw the wisdom in Joseph's plan. The king also acknowledged that Joseph's God was the real force behind Joseph's wise words. He said to his servants there in the royal court: "Can another man be found like this one in whom there is the spirit of God?" To Joseph, he said: "Since God has caused you to know

all of this, there is no one as discreet and wise as you. You will personally be over my house, and all my people will obey you implicitly. Only in my role as king will I be greater than you."—Genesis 41:38-41.

Pharaoh was as good as his word. Joseph was soon clothed in fine linen. Pharaoh gave him a gold necklace, a signet ring, a royal chariot, and full authority to travel through the land and put his plan into effect. (Genesis 41:42-44) Within the space of a day, then, Joseph went from prison to palace. He awoke a lowly convict, and he fell asleep as the ruler second to Pharaoh. How clear that Joseph's faith in Jehovah God was justified! Jehovah saw all the injustices that his servant had suffered through the years. He addressed those issues at just the right time and in just the right way. Jehovah had in mind not only correcting the wrongs done to Joseph but also preserving the future nation of Israel. We will see how that was so in a future article in this series.

If you face a trialsome situation, perhaps an injustice that seems to drag on for years on end, do not despair. Remember Joseph. Because he never lost his kindness, his humility, his endurance, and his faith, he gave Jehovah every reason to reward him in the end. ■





## “Am I in the Place of God?”

**J**OSEPH stood in his garden as dusk fell. Perhaps his gaze took in date palms and other fruit trees, pools with water plants, and just beyond the wall, a glimpse of Pharaoh’s palace. Imagine that stray snatches of sound drifted to Joseph from his own house; his son Manasseh was making his baby brother, Ephraim, giggle. Joseph could picture the scene inside, his wife laughing gently at the boys’ antics. He smiled. He knew that he was a blessed man.

Joseph had given his firstborn the name Manasseh because it referred to forgetfulness. (Genesis 41:51) God’s blessings in recent years had surely soothed the pain of Joseph’s memories of his home, his brothers, and his father. His older brothers’ hatred for him had changed his life. They had assaulted him, contemplated killing him, and then sold him as a slave to traveling merchants. Since then, his life had taken one tumultuous turn after another. For about a dozen years, he had endured slavery and then imprisonment—for a time in iron fetters. But now, here he was—the second ruler to Pharaoh in the mighty nation of Egypt!\*

For several years, Joseph had seen events unfolding just as Jehovah had foretold. Egypt was well into the prophesied seven years of plentiful harvests, and Joseph had overseen the storing of

the nation’s surplus grain. During that time, he had fathered two boys by his wife, Asenath. Still, his mind often turned to his family hundreds of miles away—especially his younger brother, Benjamin, and their dear father, Jacob. Joseph may have wondered if they were well and safe. Perhaps he wondered, too, if his older brothers had changed their violent ways or if he could ever heal the breach that had torn his family apart.

If the peace of your family has ever been disrupted by jealousy, betrayal, or hatred, you may have something in common with Joseph. What can we learn from Joseph’s faith as he took care of his family?

### “GO TO JOSEPH”

The days were busy for Joseph, and the years fled by. Just as Jehovah foretold in the dream he sent to Pharaoh, the seventh year of bumper crops was followed by a drastic change. The crops failed! Soon famine loomed over all the neighboring lands. As the Bible notes, though, “in all the land of Egypt there was bread.” (Genesis 41:54) No doubt, Joseph’s inspired prediction and his example of good organization were benefiting the Egyptian people.

The Egyptians may have felt indebted to Joseph and praised his skill as an organizer. Still, Joseph would not have wanted credit to go anywhere but to his God, Jehovah. If we use any gifts we may have in humble service to our God, he

\* See the “Imitate Their Faith” articles in the August 1, 2014; November 1, 2014; and February 1, 2015, issues of *The Watchtower*.

may put them to use in ways that exceed anything we could ever imagine.

In time, though, the Egyptians too felt the bite of the famine. When they cried out to Pharaoh for aid, he simply directed them: “Go to Joseph, and do whatever he tells you.” So Joseph began to open up the granaries where the surplus grain was stored, and the people could buy what they needed.—Genesis 41:55, 56.

In the surrounding lands, however, people were not so fortunate. Hundreds of miles away in Canaan, Joseph’s family was suffering. Aged Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, so he told his sons to go down there to buy foodstuffs.—Genesis 42:1, 2.

Jacob sent ten sons but not the youngest, Benjamin. Jacob remembered only too well the time when he sent his beloved Joseph alone to vis-

Because he remained humble, Joseph remained useful to Jehovah



it his older brothers. That was the last Jacob had seen of the boy. The older sons had brought home Joseph’s elegant coat—a mark of his father’s love and regard—all torn and bloodied. They led the heartbroken old man to believe that Joseph had been eaten by wild beasts.—Genesis 37:31-35.

#### **“JOSEPH IMMEDIATELY REMEMBERED”**

After a long journey, the sons of Jacob reached Egypt. When they inquired about purchasing grain, they were directed to a high government official named Zaphenath-paneah. (Genesis 41:45) Did they know when they saw him that he was Joseph? Not at all. They saw only a high-ranking Egyptian ruler, one whose help they needed. To show deference, they did what was natural: They “bowed low to him with their faces to the ground.”—Genesis 42:5, 6.

What about Joseph? He recognized his brothers right away! What is more, when he saw them there bowing before him, his thoughts flew back to his boyhood. The account tells us that “Joseph immediately remembered the dreams” that Jehovah had given him when he was but a boy, dreams foretelling a time when his brothers would be bowing low before him—exactly as they now were! (Genesis 37:2, 5-9; 42:7, 9) What would Joseph do? Embrace them? Take revenge?

Joseph knew that he must not act on his impulses, whatever they might be. Jehovah was clearly guiding this remarkable turn of events. His purpose was involved. He had promised to turn Jacob’s offspring into a mighty nation. (Genesis 35:11, 12) If Joseph’s brothers were still violent, selfish, unscrupulous men, the long-term effects could be disastrous! Besides, were Joseph to act impulsively, he might upset some delicate balance back at home, perhaps even endangering his father and Benjamin. Were they even alive? Joseph decided to keep his identity concealed so that he could test out his brothers and see what kind of men they had become.

Then he might know what Jehovah wanted him to do.

You are not likely ever to find yourself in that unusual position. However, strife and division within the family are common in today's world. When we face such challenges, we may tend simply to follow our heart and act on our imperfect impulses. It is much wiser to imitate Joseph and try to discern how God wants us to handle matters. (Proverbs 14:12) Remember, as important as it is to make peace with family members, peace with Jehovah and his Son is even more vital.—Matthew 10:37.

### **“YOU WILL BE TESTED”**

Joseph launched into a series of tests designed to reveal who his brothers were at heart. He started by speaking to them harshly, through an interpreter, accusing them of being foreign spies. To defend themselves, they told him about their family—including the key fact that they had a younger brother still at home. Joseph tried to hide his excitement. Was his little brother really alive? Now Joseph knew how to proceed. He said: “By this you will be tested,” and then he told them that he must see this youngest brother. In time, he agreed to let them return home to fetch the youngest if one of them would agree to remain behind as a hostage.—Genesis 42:9-20.

As the brothers talked matters over, unaware that Joseph could understand them, they reproached themselves for the terrible sin they had committed 20 years earlier. “We are surely being punished on account of our brother,” they said, “because we saw his distress when he begged us to show compassion, but we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.” Joseph understood what they were saying, and he had to turn aside so that they could not see his tears. (Genesis 42:21-24) He knew, though, that real repentance involves far more than a mere feeling of regret over the consequences of a wicked deed. So he proceeded with his test.

He sent them home and kept Simeon as a prisoner. He also had money concealed in the bags of food that they took home. The brothers journeyed home and, with difficulty, persuaded Jacob to let them take his beloved Benjamin with them to Egypt. When they arrived in Egypt, they openly told Joseph's steward of the money they had found in their bags, offering to repay the full amount. That offer was admirable, but Joseph needed to see more of their true nature. He provided them with a feast, barely concealing how moved he was upon seeing Benjamin. Then he sent them on their way homeward, again laden with food, but this time a silver cup was hidden in Benjamin's bag.—Genesis 42:26-44:2.

Joseph then sprang his trap. He had his brothers pursued, arrested, and accused of stealing the cup. When it was found in Benjamin's bag, all of them were brought back to Joseph. Now Joseph had a chance to learn what kind of men his brothers were. Judah acted as their spokesman. He pleaded for mercy, even offering that all 11 of them become slaves in Egypt. Joseph countered that Benjamin alone must remain in Egypt as a slave but that all the rest of them must leave.—Genesis 44:2-17.

Judah was moved to respond with an impassioned speech. “He is the only remaining son of his mother, and his father loves him,” Judah said. Those words must have touched Joseph, for he was the older son of Jacob's beloved wife Rachel, who had died while giving birth to Benjamin. Joseph, like his father, evidently cherished memories of Rachel. Perhaps that connection made Benjamin even dearer to Joseph.—Genesis 35:18-20; 44:20.

Judah went on to implore Joseph not to enslave Benjamin. He even offered to become a slave in Benjamin's place. Then he concluded with this heartrending plea: “How can I return to my father without the boy along with me? I could not bear looking on when this calamity





Joseph saw that his brothers regretted what they had done to him

befalls my father!" (Genesis 44:18-34) Here, now, was evidence of a changed man. Not only did he show a repentant spirit but he even showed an admirable degree of empathy, selflessness, and compassion.

Joseph could bear no more. He had to release the emotion that was pent up within him. Dismissing all his servants, he wept so loudly that the sound carried to Pharaoh's palace. Then he revealed himself at last: "I am Joseph your brother." He embraced his stunned brothers and kindly extended forgiveness for all that they had done to him. (Genesis 45:1-15) He thus reflected the disposition of Jehovah, who forgives generously. (Psalm 86:5) Do we do likewise?

#### **"YOU ARE STILL ALIVE!"**

When Pharaoh heard the whole story behind the commotion in Joseph's house, he invited Joseph to move his aged father to Egypt, along with the whole family. It was not too long, then, before Joseph was finally reunited with his beloved father. Jacob wept and said: "Now I am ready to die; I have seen your face and know that you are still alive."—Genesis 45:16-28; 46:29, 30.

In fact, Jacob lived on for another 17 years in Egypt. He lived long enough to pronounce pro-

phetic blessings on his 12 sons. To Joseph, his 11th son, he gave the double portion usually due the firstborn. Two of Israel's tribes would come from him. And what of Judah, the fourth son, who excelled his brothers when he showed such a repentant spirit? He received a great blessing: The Messiah would come from his family line!—Genesis, chapters 48, 49.

When Jacob died at 147 years of age, Joseph's brothers feared that their powerful sibling might now seek revenge. But Joseph responded with a loving reassurance. He had long maintained that since Jehovah was behind the family's move to Egypt, his brothers should stop feeling bad about what happened. Now he added this remarkable question: "Am I in the place of God?" (Genesis 15:13; 45:7, 8; 50:15-21) Joseph saw Jehovah as the perfect Judge. Who was Joseph, then, to punish those whom Jehovah had forgiven?—Hebrews 10:30.

Do you ever find it a challenge to forgive? It can be especially hard when someone has done us deliberate harm. But if we forgive from the heart those who are truly repentant, we will help to heal many a wound—including our own. And we will imitate the faith of Joseph and the example of his merciful Father, Jehovah. ■

## “I Arose as a Mother in Israel”

**D**EBORAH looked around at the soldiers who were gathered atop Mount Tabor. It was touching to see them there. In the morning light, she contemplated their bravery and the faith of their leader, Barak. Though they were 10,000 strong, their faith and courage would face a great test this day. They were going against a vicious foe, and they were outnumbered and poorly armed. But they had come here anyway—largely because of the encouragement of this one woman.

Picture Deborah, her garments rustling in the breeze as she and Barak looked out over a sweeping vista. Mount Tabor resembled a great cone with its top blunted. Its flat summit commanded a view of the Plain of Esdraelon, some 1,300 feet (400 m) below, which fanned out to the southwest. The Kishon River wound through the flat grassland, leading out to the Great Sea by Mount Carmel. The riverbed may have been dry that morning, but something else glistened on that broad plain. Sisera’s army was drawing nearer, flashing ominously with the glint of iron. It came from the pride of Sisera’s forces—some 900 chariots, which may have been equipped with iron scythes protruding from the axles. Sisera intended to cut down the ill-equipped Israelites as if he were harvesting barley!

Deborah knew that Barak and his men were waiting for some word, some signal, from her. Was she the only woman there? What was it like for her to bear so much responsibility in such a setting?

Did she wonder what she was doing there? Evidently not! Jehovah, her God, had told her to start this war; he had also revealed that he would use a woman to bring it to an end. (Judges 4:9) What can Deborah and these courageous fighters teach us about faith?

### “GO AND MARCH TO MOUNT TABOR”

When the Bible first introduces Deborah, it refers to her as “a prophetess.” That designation makes Deborah unusual in the Bible record but hardly unique.\* Deborah had another responsibility. She was also evidently settling disputes by giving Jehovah’s answer to problems that came up. —Judges 4:4, 5.

Deborah lived in the mountainous region of Ephraim, between the towns of Bethel and Ramah. There she would sit beneath a palm tree and serve the people as Jehovah directed. Her assignment was surely challenging, but Deborah did not allow it to daunt her. There was a dire need for her services. In fact, she later took part in composing an inspired song, and it included this comment about her unfaithful people: “They chose new gods; then there was war in the gates.” (Judges 5:8) Because the Israelites left Jehovah to serve other gods, Jehovah abandoned them to their enemies. Canaanite King Jabin dominated them, using a mighty general named Sisera.

\* Other prophetesses included Miriam, Huldah, and the wife of Isaiah.—Exodus 15:20; 2 Kings 22:14; Isaiah 8:3.



Sisera! The very name caused terror and panic in Israel. The Canaanite religion and culture were brutal, featuring child sacrifice and temple prostitution. What was it like to have a Canaanite general and his army dominating the land? Deborah's song reveals that travel was nearly impossible in the land and village life had all but ended. (Judges 5:6, 7) We may imagine people cowering in the woods and hills, afraid to farm or to live in un-walled villages and terrified to travel on the open roads lest they be attacked, their children taken, and their women raped.\*

Terror reigned for 20 years, until Jehovah saw evidence that his stubborn people were ready to change or, as the inspired record of the song of Deborah and Barak says, "Until I, Deborah, rose up, until I arose as a mother in Israel." We do not know if Deborah, the wife of a man named Lappidoth, was a mother in a literal sense, but this expression was intended figuratively. In effect, Jehovah assigned Deborah to provide the nation with motherly protection. He commissioned her to summon a strong man of faith, Judge Barak, and direct him to rise up against Sisera.—Judges 4:3, 6, 7; 5:7.

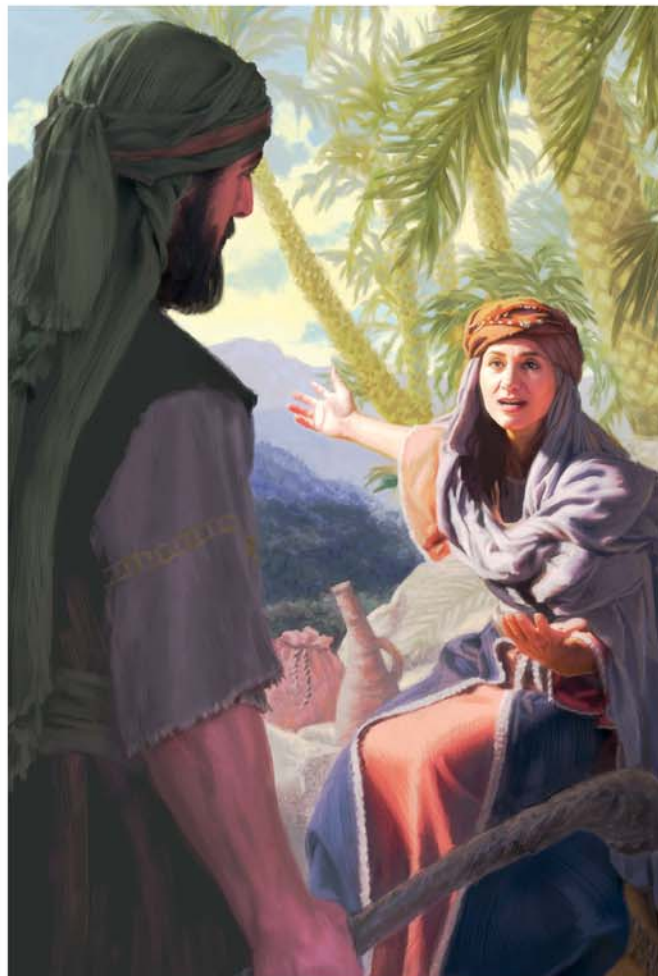
"Go and march to Mount Tabor," Jehovah ordered through Deborah. Barak was to muster 10,000 men from two of Israel's tribes. Deborah conveyed God's promise that they would defeat the mighty Sisera and his 900 chariots! The promise surely astounded Barak. Israel had no army and virtually no weaponry. Still, Barak agreed to go into battle—but only if Deborah came to Mount Tabor too.—Judges 4:6-8; 5:6-8.

Barak has been called faithless because of this request, but unfairly so. After all, he did not ask God for more weapons. Rather, as a man of faith, Barak saw the value in having Jehovah's represen-

tative there to strengthen him and his men. (Hebrews 11:32, 33) Jehovah responded favorably. He allowed Deborah to go, as Barak requested. However, Jehovah also inspired her to prophesy that the battle's final glory would not go to a man. (Judges 4:9) God had decided that a woman would execute wicked Sisera!

In today's world, a great deal of injustice, violence, and abuse is heaped upon women. Rarely are they accorded the dignity that God wants them to receive. However, God grants women and

Deborah encouraged Barak to stand up as a deliverer of God's people



\* The song of Deborah indicates that Sisera often returned from his military actions with plunder that included girls, sometimes more than one for each soldier. (Judges 5:30) The word used for "girl" in that verse literally means "womb." Such language reminds us that those women were valued mainly for their reproductive organs. Rape was likely commonplace.



men equal value and standing before him. (Romans 2:11; Galatians 3:28) Deborah's example reminds us that he also blesses women with privileges and signs of his particular trust and favor. It is vital that we never adopt the bigotry so common in this world.

### **“THE EARTH SHOOK, AND THE HEAVENS POURED”**

Barak went to muster his army. He gathered 10,000 men who were brave enough to go up against Sisera's daunting forces. As Barak led his men up to Mount Tabor, he was glad to have a way to boost their courage. We read: “Deborah also went up with him.” (Judges 4:10) Imagine how it lifted the spirits of those soldiers to see that brave woman join them in their march toward Mount Tabor, willing to risk her life at their side because of her faith in Jehovah God!

When Sisera learned that Israel had dared to muster an army against him, he acted quickly. A number of Canaanite kings joined forces with King Jabin, who may have been the most powerful among them. Then Sisera's great squadrons of chariots made the earth shake as they rumbled in formation across the plain. The Canaanites were sure that they would make quick work of the pathetic army of Israel.—Judges 4:12, 13; 5:19.

What would Barak and Deborah do as the enemy approached? If they remained on the slopes of Mount Tabor, they might have an advantage over the advancing Canaanite forces, for those chariots needed flat open country to fight effectively. But Barak was going to fight as Jehovah directed, so he waited for word from Deborah. At last, the moment came. She said: “Rise up, for this is the day that Jehovah will give Sisera into your hand. Is Jehovah not going out before you?” Next, we read: “Barak descended from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him.”—Judges 4:14.\*

\* The battle that ensued is described twice in the Bible—in the historical narrative of Judges chapter 4 and in the song of Deborah and Barak in chapter 5. The two records are complementary, each supplying details not mentioned in the other.

The forces of Israel charged down the mountain and out onto the open, flat ground, heading right toward those fearsome machines of war. Did Jehovah go out before them, as Deborah had promised? The answer came very soon. “The earth shook, and the heavens poured,” we read. Sisera's proud forces were thrown into confusion. And down came the rain! It came in such torrents, it seems, that the ground was quickly swamped. Soon, the heavy iron-bearing chariots were more of a liability than an asset. They sank into the mud and became hopelessly bogged down.—Judges 4:14, 15; 5:4.

Barak and his men were not troubled by the storm. They knew where it was coming from. They ran right at the Canaanite forces. Acting as God's executioners, the Israelites left none of Sisera's army alive. The Kishon River surged and flooded, washing the corpses downstream toward the Great Sea.—Judges 4:16; 5:21.

Today, Jehovah no longer sends his servants into physical battles. Yet, he does ask his people to engage in spiritual warfare. (Matthew 26:52; 2 Corinthians 10:4) If we try to obey God in today's world, we are taking our stand in that war. We need courage, for those who side with God today may face fierce opposition. But Jehovah has not changed. He still comes to the defense of those who, like Deborah, Barak, and the brave soldiers of ancient Israel, put their faith and trust in Him.

### **“MOST BLESSED OF WOMEN”**

One of the Canaanite enemies escaped—the worst of them all! Sisera, the great oppressor of God's people, fled the battlefield on foot. Leaving his men to die in the mire, he slipped past the Israelite soldiers and made his way to firmer ground, heading toward the nearest allies he could think of. Scurrying across miles of open terrain, ever terrified that Israelite soldiers might find him, he headed to the tents of Heber, a Kenite who had broken away from the rest of his nomadic people to the south and established some kind of accord with King Jabin.—Judges 4:11, 17.



As Deborah foretold, Jehovah fought for his people, defeating Sisera's forces

Exhausted, Sisera arrived at Heber's encampment. He found that Heber was not at home. But the man's wife, Jael, was there. Sisera evidently assumed that Jael would honor her husband's accord with King Jabin. Perhaps it was inconceivable to him that a woman could act or even think differently from her husband. Sisera obviously did not know Jael! Clearly, she saw the wickedness of the Canaanite oppression in the land; likely she also saw that she had a choice before her. Either she could aid this wicked man or she could throw in her lot with Jehovah and strike a blow against this enemy of His people. But what could she do? How could a woman vanquish such a powerful, battle-hardened warrior?

Jael had to think fast. She offered Sisera a place to rest. He ordered her to conceal his presence from any man who might come looking for him. She covered him when he lay down, and when he asked her for water, she gave him creamy milk. Soon Sisera sank into a deep sleep. Jael then took a pair of household implements that tent-dwelling women used often and skillfully—a tent pin and a mallet. Crouching near Sisera's head, she now faced the terrifying task of acting as an executioner for Jehovah. Even an instant of uncertainty or hesitation could have meant disaster. Did she

think of God's people and of how this man had brutalized them for decades? Or did she think of the privilege of taking her stand for Jehovah? The record does not say. We know only that the deed was soon done. Sisera was dead!—Judges 4:18-21; 5:24-27.

Later, Barak came in search of his quarry. When Jael showed him the corpse with the tent pin through the temples, he knew that Deborah's prophecy had come true. A woman had killed the mighty warrior Sisera! Modern-day critics and skeptics have called Jael all manner of vile names, but Barak and Deborah knew better. In their song, they were inspired to praise Jael as "most blessed of women" for her courageous deed. (Judges 4: 22; 5:24) Note the generosity of Deborah's spirit. She did not begrudge Jael such praise; rather, she cared only that Jehovah's word had come true.

With Sisera gone, King Jabin's power was broken. The Canaanite oppression was over at last. Peace prevailed for 40 years. (Judges 4:24; 5:31) How blessed were Deborah, Barak, and Jael for putting faith in Jehovah God! If we imitate the faith of Deborah, boldly taking our stand for Jehovah and encouraging others to do the same, Jehovah will bless us with victories—and lasting peace. ■

## “My Beloved and Faithful Child in the Lord”

**T**IMOTHY strode steadily along the road leading away from home, his eyes eagerly focused on what lay ahead. His companions led the way as they traversed the fields Timothy knew so well. Slowly receding behind them was the city of Lystra, which sat atop a low hill on the valley floor. Timothy smiled as he thought of his mother and grandmother, beaming with pride and hiding their tears as they watched him go. Should he turn and wave—one last time?

Now and again, the apostle Paul would turn to Timothy and smile encouragingly. He knew that Timothy still had a measure of shyness to overcome, but he was pleased to see the young man’s enthusiasm. Timothy was quite young, perhaps still in his late teens or early twenties, and he had tremendous respect and affection for Paul. Now Timothy was following this dynamic and faithful man on a journey that would take him hundreds of miles from home. They would travel on foot and by ship, facing countless dangers on the way. Timothy could not really know whether he would ever see his home again.

What led the young man to pursue such a course of life? What rewards could make such sacrifices worthwhile? And how can Timothy’s faith influence our own?

### “FROM INFANCY”

Let us go back in time two or three years, and let us assume—as seems probable—that Lystra was Timothy’s hometown. It was a small, rustic town

in a secluded, well-watered valley. The people may have understood the Greek language, but they still spoke the local tongue, Lycaonian. One day, the quiet town was in an uproar. Two Christian missionaries, the apostle Paul and his traveling companion, Barnabas, arrived from Iconium, a larger city nearby. As they preached in public, Paul caught sight of a crippled man who showed evidence of real faith. So Paul performed a miracle and healed the man!—Acts 14:5-10.

Many of the people of Lystra evidently believed in local legends about gods disguised as humans coming to the region in times past. So the people mistook Paul for Hermes and Barnabas for Zeus! The two humble Christians could barely restrain the people from sacrificing to them.—Acts 14:11-18.

To a few in Lystra, though, that occasion was no visit from mythical pagan gods; it was something real and wonderful. For instance, Eunice, a Jewish woman married to an unbelieving Greek man,\* along with her mother, Lois, surely listened to Paul and Barnabas with great eagerness and joy. Here at last was the news that every faithful Jew longed to hear—the Messiah had come and had fulfilled many prophecies written about him in the Scriptures!

Imagine how Timothy was affected by Paul’s visit. Timothy had been trained “from infancy” to love the holy writings of the Hebrew Scriptures.

\* See “Did You Know?” in this issue.





(2 Timothy 3:15) Like his mother and grandmother, he could see that Paul and Barnabas spoke the truth about the Messiah. And think of the crippled man that Paul healed. Why, from boyhood Timothy had probably seen that man countless times on the streets of Lystra. Now Timothy could see the man walking for the first time! No wonder that Eunice and Lois became Christians, as did Timothy. To this day, grandparents and parents can learn much from Lois and Eunice. Can you be an influence for good on the young?

### **“THROUGH MANY TRIBULATIONS”**

Those who became Christian disciples in Lystra must have been thrilled to learn of the hope that was held out to Christ’s followers. But they learned, too, that discipleship would exact a price. Fanatic Jewish opposers from Iconium and Antioch came into town, and they stirred up those volatile people, turning them against Paul and Barnabas. Before long, violent crowds came after Paul, hurling stones at him. Struck repeatedly, he fell to the ground. The mob dragged him outside the city and left him for dead.—Acts 14:19.

However, the disciples in Lystra went out to Paul, surrounding him. How relieved they must

have been when he stirred, got up, and then courageously went right back into Lystra! The next day, he and Barnabas left for the town of Derbe to continue their preaching. After making new disciples there as well, they again braved danger and *returned* to Lystra. To what end? “They strengthened the disciples,” the account tells us, “encouraging them to remain in the faith.” Imagine young Timothy listening, wide-eyed, as Paul and Barnabas taught those Christians that their glorious hope for the future was well worth the present cost. They said: “We must enter into the Kingdom of God through many tribulations.”—Acts 14:20-22.

Timothy had seen Paul live up to those words, facing tribulation bravely in order to share the good news with others. So Timothy knew that if he followed Paul’s example, the people of Lystra would oppose him, and his own father might oppose him as well. But Timothy was not going to allow such pressures to influence his decision about how to serve God. Today, there are many young people like Timothy. Wisely, they seek out friends with strong faith, who will encourage and strengthen them. And they do not let opposition turn them away from serving the true God!

Timothy opened his heart to the teachings of the apostle Paul



## **“HE WAS WELL-REPORTED-ON BY THE BROTHERS”**

As mentioned earlier, Paul’s next visit probably came two or three years later. Picture the excitement in Timothy’s household when Paul arrived, this time accompanied by Silas. It was surely a joyful time for Paul too. He could see for himself what had come from the seeds of truth that he had sown in Lystra. There were Lois and Eunice, her daughter, now loyal Christian women, full of that “unhypocritical faith” that Paul so admired. (2 Timothy 1:5) And what of young Timothy?

Paul learned that the young man had matured admirably since the previous visit. Timothy was “well-reported-on by the brothers,” not only in Lystra but also in Iconium, about 20 miles (32 km) to the northeast. (Acts 16:2) How had he built up such a reputation?

“The holy writings” that Timothy had been taught “from infancy” by his mother and grandmother included sound, practical counsel for young people. (2 Timothy 3:15) Here is one example: “Remember, then, your Grand Creator in the days of your youth.” (Ecclesiastes 12:1) Those words took on a deeper meaning after Timothy embraced Christianity. He saw that the best way for him to remember his Grand Creator included sharing the good news about God’s Son, the Christ. Timothy gradually learned to overcome any natural shyness that held him back and to be bold in telling others the good news about Jesus Christ.

The men taking the lead in the congregations noticed Timothy’s progress. No doubt they were touched to see how the youth built up and encouraged everyone around him. More important, though, is that Jehovah noticed Timothy. God inspired some prophecies to be made about him—perhaps relating to the kind of service he would one day render to many congregations. When Paul visited, he saw that Timothy could be a helpful traveling companion on missionary journeys. The brothers in Lystra agreed. They laid their hands on the young man, a gesture that signified that he was

appointed to a special post of service to Jehovah God.—1 Timothy 1:18; 4:14.

Timothy, we may well imagine, was awed and humbled by this great trust and responsibility. He was prepared to go.\* How, though, did Timothy’s unbelieving father react to his son’s new calling to be a traveling Christian minister? He probably had very different things in mind for his son’s future. What about Timothy’s mother and grandmother? Did they glow with pride while trying to hide their concerns for the young man’s safety? That would only be natural.

What is certain is that Timothy went. On the morning described at the outset of this article, he took up a life of traveling with the apostle Paul. As he left Lystra behind, every crunch of the pebbles under his sandals, every rustle of the grass he trampled, meant another step toward the unknown and away from his home. After a long day of walking, the three men reached Iconium. Timothy then began to observe how Paul and Silas passed on the latest directions from the governing body in Jerusalem and worked to build up the faith of the believers in Iconium. (Acts 16:4, 5) But that was only the beginning.

After visiting the congregations in Galatia, the missionaries left the broad, paved Roman roads and walked hundreds of miles across the vast tablelands of Phrygia, heading north and then west. Ever following the direction of God’s holy spirit, they made their way to Troas, boarded a ship, and sailed to Macedonia. (Acts 16:6-12) By then, Paul saw just how useful Timothy was. Paul was able to leave Timothy in Beroea with Silas. (Acts 17:14) He even sent the young man alone to Thessalonica. There Timothy imitated the examples he had observed so keenly, and he built up the faithful Christians there.—1 Thessalonians 3:1-3.

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\* Timothy was even willing to submit to circumcision at Paul’s request—not because that was a requirement for Christians but because Paul did not want to give the Jews to whom they would preach any reasons to object to the presence of this young man whose father was a Gentile.—Acts 16:3.

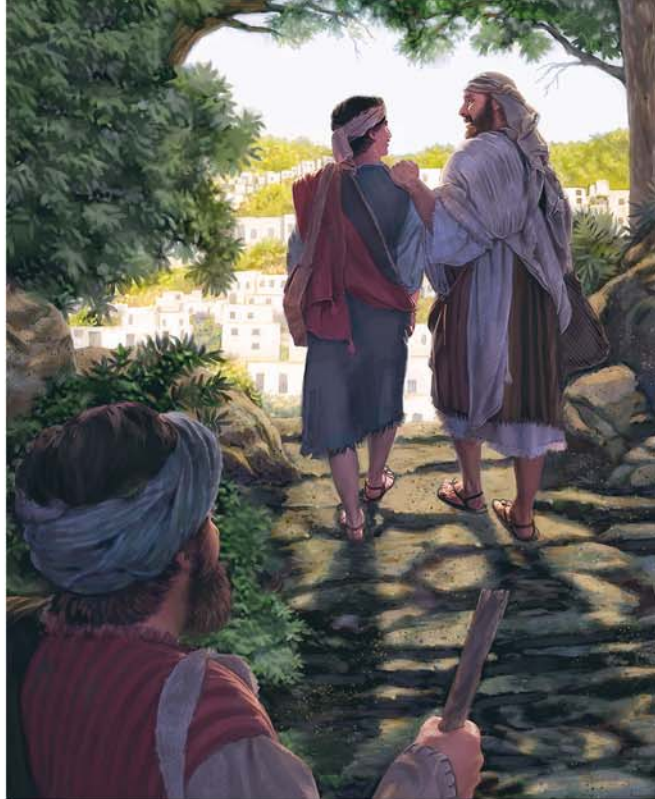
Paul later wrote about Timothy: “I have no one else of a disposition like his who will genuinely care for your concerns.” (Philippians 2:20) That reputation did not come about by accident. Timothy earned it through hard work, humble service, and faithful endurance under difficult challenges. What a remarkable example for young people today! Never forget that your reputation is largely in your own hands. If you are young, you have a marvelous opportunity to make a name for yourself by putting Jehovah God first in your life and treating others with kindness and respect.

### **“DO YOUR UTMOST TO COME TO ME”**

Over a period of about 14 years, Timothy spent a great deal of time working with the apostle Paul, his friend. He shared many of the dangers of Paul’s work and many of the joys as well. (2 Corinthians 11:24-27) At some point, Timothy was even imprisoned for his faith. (Hebrews 13:23) He also shared Paul’s deep and heartfelt love and concern for his Christian brothers and sisters. Paul thus wrote to him: “I remember your tears.” (2 Timothy 1:4) Like Paul, it seems that Timothy learned to “weep with those who weep,” empathizing with them so that he could better encourage and comfort them. (Romans 12:15) May each of us learn to do the same!

Not surprisingly, Timothy in time became an outstanding Christian overseer. Paul entrusted him with the responsibility not only to visit congregations to strengthen and encourage them but also to appoint men who qualified to serve as congregation elders and ministerial servants.—1 Timothy 5:22.

Paul was very fond of Timothy, giving much helpful counsel and fatherly advice to the younger man. He urged Timothy to nurture his spiritual gifts and to keep growing, making advancement. (1 Timothy 4:15, 16) He encouraged Timothy never to let his youth—and perhaps some natural diffidence—hold him back when it was time to take a firm stand for what is right. (1 Timothy 1:3; 4:6, 7, 11, 12) Paul even offered him advice on how to



At a young age, Timothy began a life devoted to the Christian ministry

deal with the frequent cases of sickness that beset the young man, possibly a recurring stomach ailment.—1 Timothy 5:23.

The time came when Paul knew that the end of his life was near; evidently a death by execution lay just ahead of him. He sent one final inspired letter to Timothy. It included the touching words: “Do your utmost to come to me shortly.” (2 Timothy 4:9) Paul dearly loved Timothy; he called him “my beloved and faithful child in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 4:17) No wonder that he wanted his friend by his side as the end approached! Each of us may well ask, ‘Do people seek me out as a source of comfort when they face trouble?’

Was Timothy able to reach Paul in time? We do not know. We do know that he always did his utmost to give Paul and many others comfort and encouragement. He lived up to the meaning of the name Timothy, “One Who Honors God.” And he left an outstanding example of faith for all of us, young and old, to imitate. ■





IMITATE THEIR FAITH